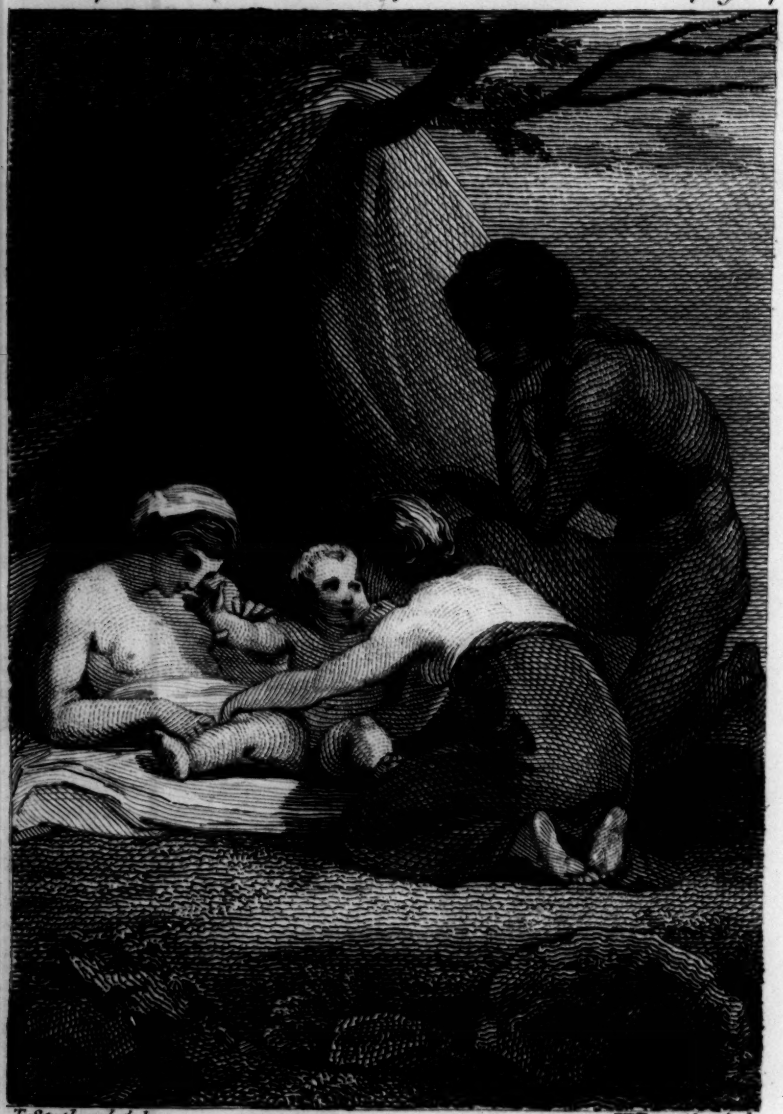

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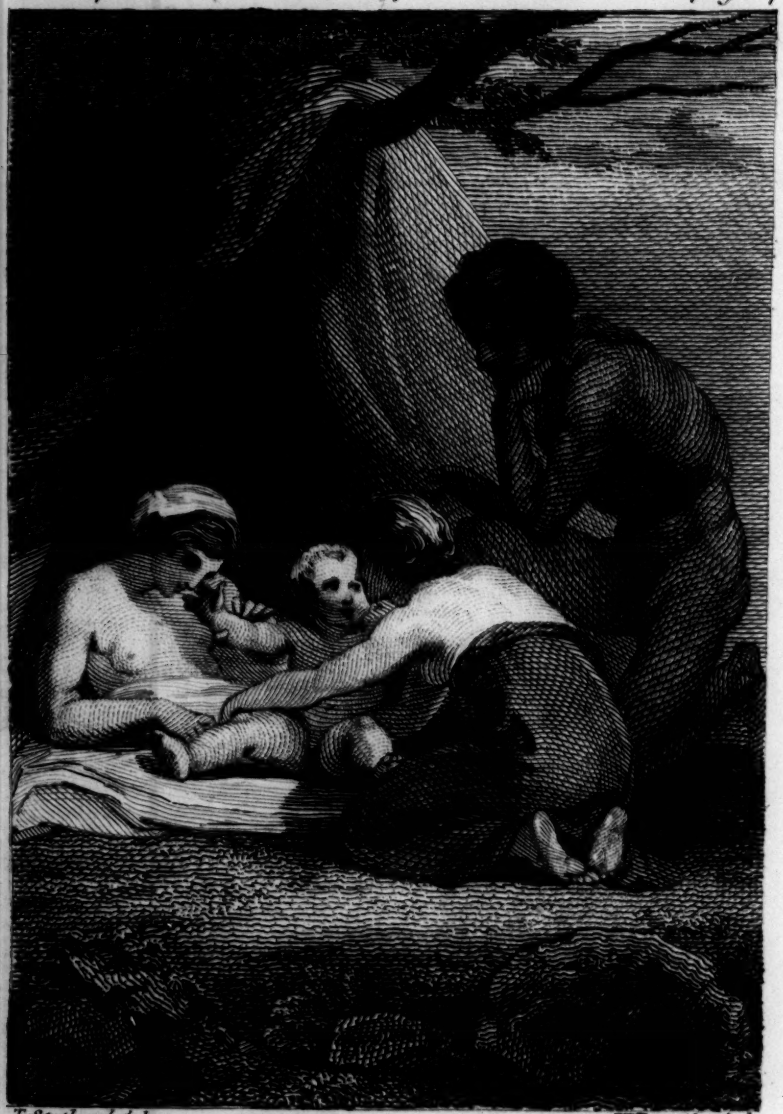

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A

Philoſophical, Hiſtorical, and *Moral*

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

BY

A FRIEND TO THE SISTERHOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE THIRD EDITION,

WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.

To unfold the ſage
And ſerious Doctrine of Virginity. MILTON's Comus.

Περι τωνδε κορων εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκουσων ανιαμαι.
ARISTOPHANES.

Nemo apud nos, qui idem tentaverit; nemo apud Græcos, qui unus omnia ea tractaverit.—Res ardua, vetuſtis novitatem dare, novis autoritatem, obſoletis nitorem, obſcuris lucem, faſtiditis gratiam, dubiis fidem, omnibus vero naturam, et naturæ ſuæ omnia. Itaque, etiam non aſſecutis, voluiſſe, abundè pulchrum atque magnificum eſt. PLINII Hiſt. Nat. Præfatio.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.

M.DCC.XCIII.

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AN

ESSAY

ON

OLD MAIDS.

BOOK III.

ON THE OLD MAIDS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD.

CHAP. I.

Introductory Chapter.

THE admirable Fielding has happily remarked, "that an author ought "to conſider himſelf not as a gentleman, "who gives a private, or eleemoſynary "treat, but rather as one who keeps a pub- "lic ordinary, at which all perſons are wel- "come for their money."

On this idea he formed for himſelf a very pleaſant and profitable rule, "to prefix not only a general bill of fare to his whole "entertainment, but to give the reader par-"ticular bills to every courſe, as he ſerved "it up in his ſucceſſive volumes."

From an incautious neglect of this enlivening regulation, the too careleſs provider of the preſent ordinary undeſignedly diſguſted ſome of his more dainty cuſtomers: who, from the want of an explanatory bill of fare to this his ſecond courſe, concluded, becauſe it differed entirely from the firſt, that it was compoſed of articles unfit for the refined luxury of a modern table; though, in truth, the well-meaning *Traiteur* had pleaſed himſelf with a hope of ſurpriſing and delighting his gueſts, by a curious ſelection of delicacies from different parts of the world.

To change a culinary metaphor for one of a lighter and more tractable kind: ſome friendly fellow travellers, who attended me with great ſatisfaction through the ſhort ſtage

ſtage of my firſt volume, where we advanced amicably together, upon a wide, though unbeaten Engliſh road, complained that they grew dizzy and confuſed, upon being precipitately hurried into a variety of ſcenes, entirely unexpected, which they could have enjoyed, had they been properly prepared for ſo extenſive an excurſion.

To thee therefore, gentle reader, who art now, for the firſt time, on the point of embarking with me on an airy expedition, that may ſavour of philoſophical temerity, I give this friendly notice, that I am now going to aſcend in the balloon of conjecture to the antediluvian world. From thence we ſhall viſit Egypt and Rome; taking a curſory, but I hope a pleaſant and inſtructive ſurvey of the ancient world.

It is an honeſt and literal truth, that eſteem and affection for ſome living old maids, and a compaſſionate concern for others, led me firſt to meditate on this intereſting community, until the ſubject of my meditation gained ſo powerful an influence

over my mind, that I could not reſt without tracing its hiſtory through all the ancient and modern viciſſitudes of life and manners. In this wide field of enquiry I was deeply engaged, and highly amuſed by thoſe eloquent eulogiſts and promoters of virginity—the primitive fathers of the church. I ſhould have deemed my work incomplete, if it had failed to exhibit a ſketch of the moſt eminent among them, and alſo of thoſe ſingular compoſitions by which they marvellouſly augmented the multitude of Old Maids. Yet theſe holy advocates for a maiden life, were ſo free in their ancedotes and expreſſions, and ſo diffuſe in their repeated exhortations to virginity; that in giving the moſt careful and guarded account of their diſcourſes, I am not without fear of ſometimes alarming the ſcrupulous by the mere phantom of indecency, and of depreſſing the volatile by the more ſubſtantial vapour of dulneſs. If that misfortune ſhould happen to be my lot, I earneſtly conjure them to let their cenſure fall, not

on

on the humble undignified author of this eſſay; but on thoſe high and hallowed prelates, whoſe compoſitions on this intereſting topic I thought myſelf obliged to review. I would not willingly admit into this work a ſingle expreſſion that could force even prudes to bluſh: but if thoſe ladies of nice imagination ſhould ever find me betrayed into ſuch an offence, I intreat them, inſtead of cenſuring me, to congratulate themſelves on the happy refinement of the times, in which it is impoſſible to tranſcribe even the compoſition of ſaints, without incurring the charge of indelicacy.

CHAP. II.

Conjectures concerning the Exiſtence of Old Maids before the Deluge.

A DUTCH author, diſtinguiſhed by his erudition and his misfortunes, has endeavoured to prove, in a diſſertation of more learning than modeſty, that, when our progenitors were firſt created, it was the intention of Heaven, that Eve herſelf ſhould become an Old Maid; and that original ſin was introduced into the world by the diſobedience of our frail mother, not literally in eating a myſterious fruit, but in wandering from the path of virgin purity. This fanciful hypotheſis did not ariſe in the heavy air of Holland—the idea was entertained by ſome illuſtrious fathers of the church; and the great living hiſtorian of the Roman empire, in thoſe ſarcaſtic remarks on Chriſtianity, which are the principal blemiſhes in his exquiſite compoſition,

poſition, has obſerved, "it was their fa-
"vourite opinion, that if Adam had pre-
"ſerved his obedience to the Creator, he
"would have lived and died in a ſtate of
"virgin purity, and that ſome harmleſs
"mode of vegetation might have peopled
"Paradiſe with a race of innocent and im-
"mortal beings." In a note to this paſſage, the great hiſtorian informs us, that "Juſtin, "Gregory of Nyſſa, Auguſtin, &c. ſtrongly "inclined to this opinion;" yet he has not attended, with his uſual accuracy, to the idea entertained by the laſt of theſe fathers on this curious point. Auguſtin, in the 14th book of his City of God, enters into a long and rather indelicate diſcuſſion of it.

He does not affirm, that Paradiſe would have been peopled by *a harmleſs mode of vegetation*, but the good father, and his learned commentator Lodovicus Vives, alledge the moſt whimſical and ludicrous occurrences that were ever recorded by a ſerious pen. The curious reader may find theſe extraordinary anecdotes related in

very coarſe but explicit language, at the 498th page of the Engliſh tranſlation of St. Auguſtin, printed in 1620. I ought, perhaps, like the holy father himſelf, when ſpeaking of matters much more indecent, to aſk the pardon of chaſte eyes, for pointing out to them ſuch indelicate wonders; but, I flatter myſelf, the kind ſiſterhood will forgive the coarſeneſs of the ſtory, for the ſake of my zealous ſolicitude to indulge their curioſity. I truſt I may afford them both amuſement and inſtruction, by ſhewing them how ſtrangely men of the moſt reverend character have been betrayed, by frivolous ſpeculation, into the groſſeſt abſurdity.

Perhaps, without the ſanctity of Auguſtin, I am now expoſing myſelf to a ſimilar cenſure; but if an enquiry into antediluvian virginity ſhould be conſidered by any moroſe or ſceptical readers as a frivolous ſpeculation, let them remember, that I am profeſſedly following the example of thoſe great antiquarians, who have aſtoniſhed

niſhed the preſent enlightened age by the profundity of their reſearches. The elaborate works of theſe gentlemen evidently prove, that they have two conſiderable and ſeparate points to purſue; the firſt and moſt important, to diſplay their own extenſive erudition; the ſecond and inferior, to inform or to amuſe their reader, which, like all other ſecondary aims, muſt be frequently ſacrificed to the more important. After the marvellous intimate acquaintance which the learned Mr. Bryant has ſhewn with the family of Chus, the grandſon of Noah, every author who profeſſes to treat of an ancient inſtitution, may be reaſonably expected to give ſome account of whatever relates to it, either immediately after, or long before the deluge; and the reſpect which I bear to the ſiſterhood makes me ambitious of ſhewing them, that I have diligently ranſacked ſuch memorials of paſt ages, both genuine and fictitious, as I thought likely to elucidate the hiſtory of their long-neglected though venerable order;

der: yet, as it is an eſtabliſhed privilege of authors to point out their own particular merits, and the particular failings of their brethren, let me here modeſtly boaſt of my own candour, in not endeavouring to raiſe the antiquity of the intereſting order to which my pen is devoted, at the expence of truth; a failing that almoſt all my brother antiquarians may be ſaid, I fear, to have learned from each other. For my own part, I wiſh the chaſte ſiſterhood, in all points that concern both themſelves and others, to diſtinguiſh rumour from fact.

On theſe principles I ſhall proceed to tell them, that Eve herſelf has been ſaid to have inſtituted a religious order of certain young women, who were to continue virgins, and to preſerve unextinguiſhed the fire, which had fallen from heaven on the ſacrifice of Abel *. This chaſte inſtitution is reported to have ariſen in the ninety-ninth year of the world. An advocate for

* St. Romuald Abrégé du Treſor Chronologique.

the

the exiſtence of antediluvian chaſtity may appeal to an evidence of reſpectable authority, to no leſs a perſonage than the prophet Enoch, the ſeventh in a direct line from Adam. In certain fragments, ſtill preſerved, of this moſt early writer, we are told, that ſome women, in the age of this ingenious patriarch, had devoted themſelves to a life of virginity: but it is proper to add, that although the compoſition of Enoch is mentioned in the Epiſtle of St. Jude, the authenticity of theſe fragments has been forcibly called in queſtion, and, though quoted and defended by ſome of the fathers, yet moſt modern authors of eminence, and particularly the learned Sir Walter Rawleigh, in the firſt book of his Hiſtory of the World, ſeem inclined to conſider them as a fiction.

The very conciſe narration which Moſes has given us of events before the flood, has tempted the fanciful rabbies of the Jews, and other writers on ſacred hiſtory, to amuſe themſelves with the compoſition of various

antediluvian

antediluvian romances: among the moſt remarkable and amuſing of theſe, we may reckon the fable of an amorous connection between the apoſtate angels and the daughters of men; a fable ſo faſcinating to a lively imagination, that our divine poet has introduced it, in the moſt ſerious manner, as a part of Satan's anſwer to Belial, in the 2d book of Paradiſe Regained.

Before the flood, thou, with thy luſty crew,
Falſe titled Sons of God, roaming the earth,
Caſt wanton eyes on the daughters of men.
Ver. 179, &c.

We may obſerve alſo, that in his greater poem, this ſublimeſt of bards alludes more than once to this illicit commerce

Betwixt th' angelical and human kind.

As the idea was founded on a miſconſtruction of the following paſſage in the ſixth chapter of Geneſis, "The ſons of God ſaw "the daughters of men, that they were fair, "and

"and they took them wives of all which "they choſe," this ſtrange ſtory has been ſometimes an object of the moſt ſerious credit; and a very learned modern divine * has annexed, to his elaborate Hiſtory of the Patriarchs, a diſſertation to prove, from ſcripture, from reaſon, and from the nature of angels, that theſe ætherial ſpirits, whatever ſhape they might aſſume, were utterly incapable of begetting children.

If we might venture to conſider this fable as genuine hiſtory, we might certainly draw from it a very ſtrong argument againſt the exiſtence of antediluvian Old Maids; for, if the evil ſpirits were permitted to exerciſe ſuch power over the females of the infant world, what fair individual could be ſuppoſed to have preſerved her chaſtity, when both men and demons were perſonally engaged in its deſtruction?

But, rejecting this fabulous interference of theſe licentious angels, and adhering to the more juſt interpretation of the Moſaic

* Heidegger.

hiſtory,

hiſtory, let us now examine what we may fairly conclude on the point in queſtion. The family of Seth are repreſented as orderly and devout; but, as the ſtate of the world ſeemed to require a haſty increaſe of its inhabitants, it is not probable that any female, even in that ſober race, ſhould have proved ſo unreaſonable as to decline concurring in the important work of peopling the wide wilderneſs of the earth. If any peculiar ſanctity or ſelf-denial may be ſuppoſed to have exiſted, for a ſhort time, among this more innocent diviſion of the human race, it was ſoon overpowered by the influence of the moſt licentious examples. The purity of the Sethites was corrupted by the temptations they found among the children of Cain; and the ſtate of female manners at this period is very forcibly deſcribed in the following lines of Milton:

For that fair female troop thou ſaw'ſt, that ſeem'd
Of Goddeſſes ſo blithe, ſo ſmooth, ſo gay,

Yet

Yet empty of all good, wherein conſiſts
Woman's domeſtic honour and chief praiſe;
Bred only and completed to the taſte
Of luſtful appetence, to ſing, to dance,
To dreſs, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye;
To theſe that ſober race of men, whoſe lives
Religious titled them the ſons of God,
Shall yield up all their virtue, all their fame,
Ignobly, to the trains and to the ſmiles
Of theſe fair atheiſts, and now ſwim in joy,
Ere long to ſwim at large; and laugh, for which
The world, ere long, a world of tears muſt weep.

Paradiſe Loſt, Book xi. ver. 614.

Theſe verſes, compared with the former quotation from Paradiſe Regained, afford a ſtriking proof how ingeniouſly the great poet adopted the moſt oppoſite interpretations of ſcripture, as they happened to ſuit his poetical purpoſes.

I cannot help remarking, that although ſome lines in the paſſage juſt quoted are

ſupremely beautiful, yet, in the cloſe of it, both the genius and the juſtice of this incomparable poet appear to have deſerted him: the puerility of expreſſion in the two laſt lines is particularly unhappy; and the aſſertion, that *female wantonneſs* was the chief cauſe of the deluge, appears rather uncandid and cruel. Let us, however, apologiſe for the nobleſt of bards, on this occaſion, by obſerving, that he was probably miſled by his reverence for a learned and holy character, as his deſcription ſeems to be borrowed from the annals of Eutychius, the patriarch of Alexandria.

Though I cannot ſubſcribe to this ſeverity on the firſt female inhabitants of the world, yet, after what I have alledged, I may venture, I think, to terminate this chapter, by aſſerting, that from every thing which a diligent enquiry can collect on this very deep and delicate queſtion, we have the ſtrongeſt reaſon to ſuppoſe, there never exiſted ſuch a being as an antediluvian Old Maid.

Into

Into what blind and unjuſt conjectures are we poor mortals betrayed, when we attempt to eſtimate the conſtitution and character of our remote predeceſſors!—I had juſt cloſed the preceding ſpeculation againſt the exiſtence of an antediluvian Old Maid, when I was agreeably ſurpriſed by the arrival of a packet from a learned friend, who had promiſed to collect for me, in his travels over Europe and Aſia, every ſcrap of antiquity that could afford me any light in my maiden reſearches. Although the favour which I have now received from him abundantly proves, that I was groſsly miſtaken in my conjectural account of antediluvian virginity, I ſhall ſuffer what I had written to ſtand, as a warning to future antiquarians, not to indulge themſelves in ſuch haſty deciſions.

I cannot more ſtrongly expreſs my zeal for the ſiſterhood, than by preſenting to them, with a ſincere delight, this very choice morſel of antediluvian hiſtory, which deſtroys my hypotheſis, and by thus aſ-

ſerting their primæval honour, at the expence of my own hiſtorical ſagacity.—My friend, the learned traveller, writes me word from Spain, which he is now viſiting on his return, that as ſoon as he reaches England, he ſhall correct for the preſs a journal of his tour; that in a ſupplement to his travels, he intends to inſert ſome other ancient tracts, which he has fortunately reſcued from oblivion; that he will there recount the incidents which led to their diſcovery, and clearly prove that the fragment, with which he has favoured me, muſt have proceeded from the pen of Enoch himſelf. He aſſures me, that he has ſent a moſt faithful tranſlation; and that he can demonſtrate, by unanſwerable arguments, that this fragment was contained among thoſe very writings of Enoch which the pious Tertullian declared he had peruſed, and from which the celebrated Poſtellus confeſſed he had borrowed very freely, in his elaborate treatiſe on the origin of things.

But I ſhall wave all farther preface, that I may no longer detain the reader from a precious and intereſting moral tale of the moſt eminent author that exiſted before the deluge.

"And among the ninety and three "daughters of Enoch, there was none like "*Kunaza: ſhe was beautiful, but de-"ſpiſed her beauty; ſhe was nimble as the "deer, yet delighted not in the dance.

"She looked with pity on thoſe who "truſted in the fleeting pleaſures of the "earth.

"She ſaw that love was poiſoned with "jealouſy, and that marriage was embit-"tered by ſtrife.

* NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

I am inclined to ſuppoſe, that the name of this intereſting perſonage, Kunaza, has been miſ-ſpelt, in the haſte of tranſcription, and that it ought to be written *K*anaza, which ſignifies, in the Arabic language, to *depoſit as a treaſure*; a ſignification that the word might naturally acquire, from the ſingular hiſtory of the maiden, whoſe name it originally was—as we uſe the verb *to hector*, from the old Trojan hero.

" Her ſoul was enamoured of heavenly
" contemplation, and ſhe ſaid to her father,
" O my father, permit me to live and to
" die a virgin! Conduct me through life by
" the light of thy ſpirit, and teach me to
" walk with thee in the way of our Cre-
" ator!

" And her father rejoiced in the purity
" of his child; but the kindred of Kunaza
" held her continence in deriſion.

" They ſaid to her, There is no plant
" that beareth not ſeed, and no creature
" that doth not produce young:

" Thou wilt be the only fruitleſs thing
" upon the face of the earth; and when
" thou departeſt, there will be none to la-
" ment thee.

" But Kunaza diſregarded their ſcoffs;
" and in the two hundred and ninety-firſt
" year of her age, ſhe rejected the laſt offer
" that was made to her of marriage.

" Now it happened at this time, that the
" angels appointed to watch the earth for-
" got their duty:

" They

" They ſaw that women were beautiful;
" and they burned with impure deſires for
" the daughters of men:

" They proſpered in their career of un-
" cleanneſs: they made the earth a ſcene
" of abomination:

" They begot a multitude of giants;
" and they boaſted of their enormities.

" For Semiexas, the prince of the licen-
" tious angels, commanded twenty of their
" chiefs to appear before him:

" And they bound themſelves by an
" oath to aſſemble together on the ninth
" night of every new year, and to recount,
" in order, the feats of their impurity.

" And they aſſembled on the ſummit of
" a mountain, which was called Hermo-
" niim, or the Mountain of the Oath.

" But the moon hid her head, and the
" ſtars refuſed to witneſs the vaunts of
" their uncleanneſs.

" And they rejoiced in the darkneſs
" which their diſcourſe engendered, becauſe
" their deeds had been evil.

" And Semiexas, their prince, firſt re-
" lated the evil which he had done:

" And Atarkuph related the evil which
" he had done:

" And Arakiel related the evil which he
" had done:

" And Chababiel related the evil which
" he had done:

" And Sapſick related the evil which he
" had done.

" And of the twenty impure ſpirits, one
" only continued ſilent, and the ſilent one
" was Pharmarus.

" And their prince Semiexas was offend-
" ed by his ſilence, and commanded him
" to ſpeak.

" And Pharmarus looked up with a
" look of indignant deriſion, and he ſaid:

" Ye are ſpirits of low ambition; ye are
" contented with the ſhadow of victory,
" where there is no reſiſtance.

" But I rejoice to contend with reluc-
" tant caprice: I delight to triumph over
" the coy maiden, over the maiden of much
" delay, and of many excuſes.

"And as he ſpake, there aroſe from "the aſſembly of angels a noiſy burſt of "inſurmountable laughter.

"The mountain was ſhaken to its baſe "by the ſhout of their deriſion.

"And Semiexas their prince exclaimed: "O Pharmarus, inventor of magic! O "thou dealer in dark things! Is there "verily ſuch a maiden upon the face of the "earth?

"And Pharmarus anſwered, and ſaid: O "thou prince of the impaſſioned angels, I "wonder not that thou art ſlow to believe "me:

"For thou haſt met with no female, that "could reſiſt thy perfection. The beauty "of woman has yielded unto thee, as the "ſoft air yieldeth to the imperious wing of "the eagle.

"But attend, and I will impart to you "the wonderful things I have diſcovered "among the daughters of men.

"As we ourſelves have panted for the "pleaſures of earth, as we have burnt for "the enjoyments of corporeal exiſtence;

" So has woman alſo had the ambition to " exchange her nature, and to cloath her- " ſelf in the perfection of ſpirit.

" I ſought the embraces of Kunaza, the " maiden daughter of Enoch; but though " the prime of her youth is departed, ſhe " diſdainfully turned from my intreaty.

" She has renounced the delights of her " nature; ſhe has determined to give her " virginity to the grave. Yet in time ſhe " ſhall accede to my wiſhes; for I have " ſtudied the weakneſſes of woman.

" Her principal weakneſſes are four; " and I will make an experiment on the in- " fluence of each.

" I will awaken her pride; and that " alone may tempt her to unite with Phar- " marus.

" I will excite her avarice; and ſhe may " then be eager to give her beauty in ex- " change for the glittering ſpoils of the " earth.

" I will ſtimulate her deſire; and her " powers of reſiſtance will melt away.

" I will

" I will inflame her curioſity; and what " is there, which the maiden who thirſts for " a ſecret, will not give to obtain it?

" I ſwear, by the ſubtlety of the ſerpent, " ſhe ſhall not eſcape from my paſſion.

" I will triumph over the coy perverſity " of the virgin, or I will ſhake this round " earth to its centre.

" And the prince Semiexas anſwered, and " ſaid; Well haſt thou ſpoken, Pharmarus, " thou inventor of magic! thy ſpeech is " worthy of thyſelf, thou dealer in occult " machinations!

" Go! and proſper in thy devices! and " when we next aſſemble, divert us with " the relation of thy ſucceſs.

" He ſpoke; he diſſolved the aſſembly; " and Pharmarus departed from his fel- " lows.

" He departed to employ himſelf alone " in the evil, of which he intended to " vaunt in their next meeting; but he was " doomed to meet them no more.

" And now he pondered in ſolitude on

" various

" various wiles: he exerted all the ſubtlety " of his ſpirit to circumvent the virgin.

" He approached her under the guiſe of " a friend; he became familiar with the " maiden in the ſhape of an inſtructor.

" She liſtened with avidity to his know- " ledge; her underſtanding feaſted on the " wonders he revealed: and it happened " on a certain day, while he converſed with " her on the art of divination, that Phar- " marus ſuddenly exclaimed:

" O, Kunaza, thou art yet to learn, that " on this day thy ſiſter Kezia has brought " a young Anack (or giant) into the " world.

" The wonders of nature are worth the " attention of the wiſe: let us haſten to the " tent of thy ſiſter; let us examine how " ſhe has improved, by her travail, the little " race of the earth.

" And Kunaza aroſe with Pharmarus, " and ſhe haſtened to the tent of her ſiſter:

" And behold all things had happened " as Pharmarus had foretold to Kunaza.

" For

" For Kezia, the ſeventieth daughter of " Enoch, had conceived by Semiexas, the " prince of the licentious angels. She had " brought him a male child; and this was " the firſt Anack that was born upon the " earth.

" And Kunaza beheld the infant, and " ſhe was aſtoniſhed in ſurveying its ſtature.

" She embraced the babe with amaze- " ment, and ſhe delighted in the magnitude " of its limbs!

" And ſhe delivered the babe to its mo- " ther Kezia, and ſhe obſerved the proud " tranſport of the mother, in contemplating " the dimenſions of the child.

" And the firſt temptation of Pharmarus " began to work in the boſom of Kunaza; " and her heart ſaid in ſecret to itſelf, How " pleaſant a thing it muſt be, to look with " the eyes of a mother on the ſmiling face of " a young giant!

" And Pharmarus read all her inmoſt " thoughts; he exulted, and burned to be " alone with the virgin.

" And

" And he prevailed on Kunaza to walk " abroad from the tent of her ſiſter, that he " might ſhew her ſome latent wonders of " the creation.

" And as he walked by the ſide of the " maiden, he ſtrove to fan the riſing wiſh " ſhe had felt, to experience the proud de- " lights of a parent.

" But the mind of the maiden had ar- " gued with itſelf; and theſe were the dic- " tates of her mind:

" O Kunaza, make uſe of thy reaſon! " and reſiſt the temptation of pride, which " is founded upon folly!

" Of the ninety and three daughters of " thy father, there is not one who may not " bring forth a young Anack.

" Couldſt thou be proud of what the " moſt fooliſh of thy ſex may accompliſh? " of a work in which fools may excel?

" O Kunaza, if thou wert deſtined by thy " nature to feel the weakneſs of pride, let " thy pride at leaſt be confined to a venial " exultation in the excellence of thy ſpirit!

" And

" And Pharmarus read theſe unuttered
" words in her ſoul; and he ſaw that ſhe
" would not fall by the influence of pride.

" And he now laboured to tempt her
" with treaſures, and to bribe her into
" compliance with his deſire.

" He offered her a metal, whoſe po-
" liſhed ſplendor ſhould emulate the ſun;
" and a ſtone, whoſe luſtre ſhould contend
" with the brilliancy of her eyes.

" He exclaimed, O Kunaza, give thyſelf
" to Pharmarus, and he will make thee to
" be called the richeſt among women.

" But the ſubtle angel could not raiſe for
" a moment the baſe paſſion of avarice in
" the noble heart of Kunaza.

" The maiden anſwered, and ſaid, The
" true wealth of a woman is peace of ſpirit,
" and her brighteſt ornaments are modeſty
" and meekneſs.

" And Pharmarus marvelled at her diſ-
" cretion; and he was inwardly vexed with
" a great vexation.

" But he ſuppreſſed the murmur of diſ-
" appointment,

" appointment, and haſtily engaged in new
" ſtratagems againſt the maiden.

" And as he ſtill walked in converſe
" with Kunaza, he ſtopped beneath the in-
" viting ſhade of a majeſtic palm.

" And he ſaid, Thou intelligent maiden,
" who delighteſt in the hiſtory of the earth,
" attend, and I will inſtruct thee in myſte-
" rious wonders, that relate to this tree.

" But obſerve its goodly growth; and
" obſerve the happy creatures that ſport
" within the ample ſpace of its long-ex-
" tended ſhadow!

" And Kunaza ſurveyed the tree; ſhe
" ſaw that it was ſupreme in beauty.

" The ground beneath it was flowery, and
" fragant as Paradiſe: the moſt tender and
" lovely animals of the creation were aſ-
" ſembled in its ſhade, and every animal
" was happy with its mate.

" O Kunaza, ſaid the falſe and artful
" Pharmarus, I will now tell thee the bleſ-
" ſings that belong to this ſpot.

" Thou beholdeſt the firſt nuptial couch

" of

" of thy parents; it was here that Eve firſt
" reclined, when the envy of the guardian
" ſpirits had expelled her from Eden.

" It was here that ſhe became firſt ac-
" quainted with connubial endearment; and
" felt herſelf repaid for the paradiſe ſhe had
" loſt.

" And the angel of union gave a bleſſ-
" ing to the tree, under which the firſt mo-
" ther reclined:

" He bleſſed the tree, and all the ground
" that extendeth under the ſhadow thereof.

" He bleſſed all the creatures that ſport
" around it: he ordained that every daugh-
" ter of woman, who reclines beneath its
" ſhade, ſhall experience unutterable joy,
" beyond the common joy of her ſex.

" But this bleſſing has been long for-
" gotten by the heedleſs offspring of man:
" it is a joyous ſecret reſerved for me to
" impart to my beloved.

" So ſpake the ſubtle Pharmarus; and as
" he ſpake, he infuſed into the wondering
" virgin the thrilling flame of deſire.

" The

" The boſom of Kunaza began to heave,
" and her breath on a ſudden grew ſhort.

" And Pharmarus exulted in his ſubtlety,
" and was preparing to complete his
" triumph.

" And a piercing cry was heard from
" afar; and Kunaza ſtarted up at the
" ſound.

" She liſtened, and the cry redoubled;
" and Kunaza exclaimed, As ſure as we
" have life, it is the cry of a woman in
" travail!

" And ſhe heard the ſound a third time;
" and ſhe ſaid, Verily it is the expreſſion of
" that pain, which was inflicted upon wo-
" man for liſtening to a ſubtle tempter:

" It is a warning to the weak Kunaza.
" I thank thee, my good angel: I feel that
" thou haſt ſaved me from the ſubtlety of
" Pharmarus.

" And as the virgin ſpoke, ſhe ſprung
" forward, and haſtened towards the place
" from whence the cry had proceeded.

" And Pharmarus began to purſue her;

" but

" but he ſtopped in his purſuit, and re-
" flected, that the influence of his temp-
" tation was vaniſhed from her frame.

" He roamed in diſcontent about the
" earth; and employed himſelf in darker
" devices to enſnare the maiden.

" And he ſent curious gifts, which he
" had collected from the extremities of the
" earth, to entice the virgin again from
" the tent of her father.

" He promiſed to entertain her with all
" the latent wonders of the creation; and
" he drew her by magical illuſion into the
" inmoſt receſſes of a gloomy grove.

" He appeared to her in all his falſe
" grandeur, as the prince of magic, whom
" the elements obey as their lord, and to
" whom light and darkneſs are one:

" Whoſe word can render what exiſteth
" inviſible, and make the thing which is
" not, appear as the thing which is.

" And Kunaza marvelled at his powers:
" and he took her by the hand, and ſaid;

" O thou maiden of angelical ſpirit!

" who haſt a paſſion to dive into the myſ-
" teries of the univerſe,

" Liſten to me! Give me thy love, and
" I will fill thy capacious mind with that
" myſterious knowledge for which thy heart
" panteth!

" Thou haſt upbraided me, that I ſeek
" to deceive thee; and thou haſt mentioned
" the example of thy parent Eve:

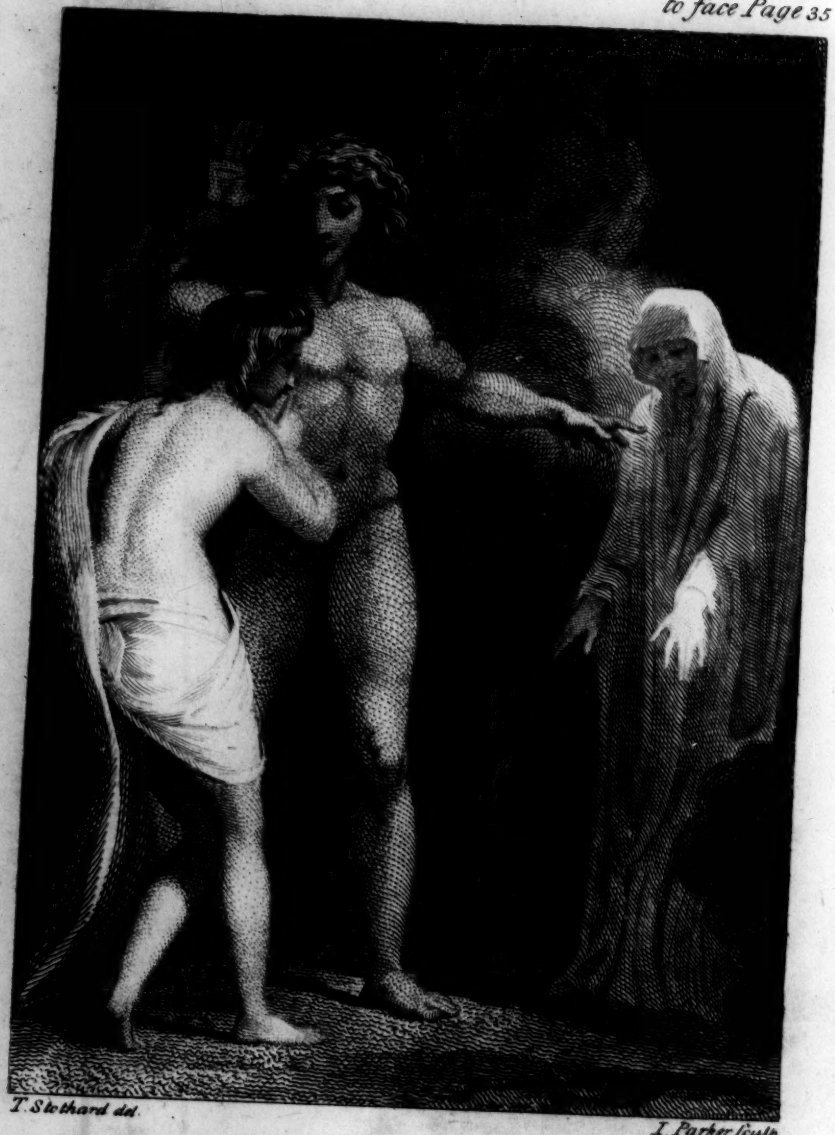
" But I will ſhew thee thou deceiveſt
" thyſelf, if thou haſt courage to learn the
" real truth from the dead.

" Tell me, thou moſt angelic among the
" daughters of men, ſhall I ſet the appari-
" tion of thy firſt parent before thee? Shall
" I call up the departed Eve from the
" grave, to tell thee what it truly becometh
" all her daughters to do?

" And Kunaza pondered, and ſaid, Verily
" it would pleaſe me to ſee and hear the de-
" parted ſpirit of the firſt woman.

" And Pharmarus exulted, and ſaid, My
" ſoul delights in thy fellowſhip, O thou
" moſt magnanimous of mortals!

" And



T. Stothard del.

I. Parker sculp.

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" And he ſtruck the earth with his foot: " the ground trembled, and was rent aſun- " der:

" From the opening thereof there iſſued " a thick ſmoke, and after the ſmoke, there " aroſe a venerable phantom:

" And the phantom had the viſage of " Eve; and it bowed the head and ſpake:

" Deceive not thyſelf with falſe pride, " O my daughter! Let me warn thee " not to live and die in a fooliſh ignorance " of delights, which thy frame has been " faſhioned to enjoy!

" Such were the words of the phantom; " and it waited not for reply, but ſunk " again into the earth.

" And the face of Kunaza was covered " with confuſion; and ſhe was almoſt a- " ſhamed that ſhe was yet a virgin.

" And Pharmarus read her inmoſt " thoughts, and exulted:

" He ſaw that his illuſions began to pre- " vail over her ſenſes; and he continued " to tempt her ſtill farther.

" He preſſed her trembling hand, and " he exclaimed, Thou alone art worthy " amongſt women to participate in the " deep diſcoveries of my ſpirit.

" O bleſs me with thy beauty, Kunaza! " and I will enrich thee with a wonderous " power, which no mortal but thyſelf ſhall " poſſeſs.

" I will enable thee to elude the ravage " of time; and, when ſeven centuries have " rolled over thy head, to appear ſtill as " lovely as thou art in this moment.

" I will teach thee to make thyſelf invi- " ſible with the rapidity of thought, and, " by paſſing unſeen at thy pleaſure, to pe- " netrate every ſecret thou canſt wiſh to " diſcover.

" Thus ſpake the inſidious Pharmarus; " and the curioſity of the maiden was in- " flamed:

" There were many things that ſhe " panted to know, and in her heart ſhe co- " veted ſupernatural power.

" And Pharmarus ſaw that his tempta-

" tion

" tion had entered into her ſoul; and he
" exulted in the ſucceſs of his devices.

" He continued to ſolicit the maiden;
" and her boſom was convulſed with a
" doubtful conflict.

" Her cheek became red as the crimſon
" roſe; but ſhe threw back her head upon
" her ſhoulder, to avoid the flaming eyes
" of Pharmarus.

" And as the pine bendeth beneath the
" paſſing wind, ſo was the reaſon of Kunaza
" bowed down by the ſudden guſt of de-
" ſire.

" She trembled in the ſtruggle of paſ-
" ſions; but her virtuous ſpirit aroſe with
" new vigour, as the tree ariſeth from a tran-
" ſient preſſure, and points directly to the
" heaven, by whoſe influence it proſpers.

" And the ſoul of the maiden now com-
" muned with itſelf, and ſaid:

" O Kunaza, ſuppreſs the evil ambition
" that ſubtlety is kindling in thy boſom.

" Pharmarus may enable thee indeed to
" elude every mortal eye; but from the

" ſight of God and his angels, there is none
" who can teach thee to eſcape.

" Then wiſh not to purchaſe ſuperna-
" tural power by the ſacrifice of a greater
" good; by loſing the ineſtimable peace of
" an innocent ſpirit.

" And while her ſoul was thus commun-
" ing with itſelf, every evil deſire departed
" from the purified heart of the virgin.

" She turned her face to Pharmarus;
" ſhe looked on him with a look of diſdain,
" and ſaid:

" Away from me, thou unworthy ſpirit!
" The ſoul of Kunaza is impowered to ab-
" hor and deride thy inſidious machina-
" tions.

" Thou ſeekeſt to rob me of a treaſure,
" which if I ſhould weakly ſuffer thee to
" take, all the potent ſpells of thy magic
" can never reſtore it to the repentant
" mourner.

" And the frenzy of rage and diſap-
" pointment began to ſwell in the ſoul of
" Pharmarus.

" He

" He caſt a furious glance upon the vir-
" gin, and ſaid:

" By the powers of darkneſs, thou art as
" ſubtle as the ſerpent himſelf. Had thy
" parent Eve been poſſeſſed of thy cun-
" ning, ſhe had made the prince of temp-
" ters a fool.

" But I ſwear, by the flames that burn
" within me, thou ſhalt not eſcape from
" my embrace: I will make thee the proud
" mother of a young giant.

" And he graſped the virgin with the
" vehement graſp of outrageous deſire: and
" ſhe ſhrieked aloud in the agonies of
" terror.

" And at the ſound of her ſhriek, the
" angel Gabriel alighted upon the earth:
" Pharmarus ſaw him, and was abaſhed for
" a moment.

" Then all his evil paſſions rekindled
" with double fury; and he prepared to
" contend with Gabriel for the poſſeſſion
" of Kunaza.

" But his powers of reſiſtance were wi-

" thered by the glance of rebuke that
" flaſhed from the radiant viſage of the pro-
" tecting ſpirit.

" And Gabriel ſeized him with the arm
" of juſtice and power; and exclaimed with
" mild dignity to the maiden:

" O Kunaza! thou haſt fought a good
" fight; and all the faithful ſpirits of
" heaven are thy friends.

" Know that the ſeraph Uriel and I are
" ſent from the throne of God to puniſh the
" falſe and licentious angels, who have de-
" baſed their nature with the impurities of
" the earth,

" And in honour of thy virtue, it is or-
" dained by thy Maker, Kunaza, that thy
" enemy, Pharmarus, ſhall fall the firſt
" victim to the juſt vengeance of heaven.

" Open, earth! and impriſon in thy ca-
" verns the treacherous guardian, who has
" attempted to violate the pureſt of thy
" daughters!

" The earth opened to her centre, at the
" command

" command of the avenging angel, and " there, with a chain of penal fire, * * * "

It is with great concern I inform my reader, that this invaluable fragment does not extend beyond the preceding imperfect ſentence. I am perſuaded, that every perſon of feeling, every true friend to virginity, muſt lament, that we are not made fully acquainted with the final deſtiny of the intereſting Kunaza. We may, however, ſafely affirm, that after ſhe had reſiſted ſo ſucceſſfully all the baſe machinations and power of the prince of magic, ſhe could never fall by the ſtrength or artifice of man. I truſt, therefore, that her name and character will now obtain the honour they deſerve, from all the nations of the modern world: and that the ſiſterhood, in particular, will never fail to revere her, as the original preſident of Old Maids.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Conjectures concerning Old Maids among the Jews, Ægyptians, and ſome other Nations of Antiquity.

IN the firſt centuries after the deluge, it ſeems to have been the wiſh of every individual to aſſiſt in the great buſineſs of re-peopling the deſolated world. At a time when a numerous progeny was conſidered as real opulence, and a peculiar mark of the divine favour, it is not probable that any female ſhould have willingly precluded herſelf from the moſt envied diſtinction. Indeed, the Hebrew women appear to have been actuated by the moſt lively deſire of increaſing the number of their reſpective families. Children were regarded as ſuch a treaſure, that ſeveral wives of the patriarchs, whom nature had diſappointed in this expectation, very chearfully corrected the

the unkindneſs of their own conſtitution, by preſenting a handmaid to their huſbands. Among all the Moſaic inſtitutions, there is no trace of any order of men or women devoted to a ſingle life; and, though ſome of the fathers, who have ſtudied, in their writings, to raiſe the honour of monaſtic virginity, have affected to derive it from Miriam the ſiſter of Moſes, by aſſerting that ſhe died a virgin, at the age of an hundred and thirty-three years, it is ſaid with more probability, that this muſical ſiſter of the Jewiſh legiſlator was herſelf married to Hur, a man of eminence in the tribe of Judah. St. Jerome, whoſe zeal for chaſtity has ſometimes tranſported him beyond the limits of ſober reaſon, expreſſes an inclination to believe, that ſeveral women, before the Chriſtian æra, received the gift of prophecy from God, as a reward for their leading a life of virginity:—but it is remarkable, that the celebrated Hebrew propheteſſes were married women. Deborah was the wife of Lapidoth; and Huldah, whoſe

whoſe prophecy is recorded in the 22d chapter of the ſecond book of Kings, is not only mentioned as the wife of Shallum, but is ſaid to have dwelt in the college of Jeruſalem; a ſufficient proof that virginity was not required in thoſe females, who made a part of that hallowed inſtitution. The heroine as well as the propheteſs might contribute to the glory of her nation, without any claim to this chaſte perfection. Jael, who is celebrated in a ſong of triumph for the ſlaughter of Siſera, was the wife of Heber the Kenite; and the more noble Judith, immortaliſed for delivering her country, by the deſtruction of Holofernes, was, at the time of her exploit, a young widow. Throughout the hiſtory of the Jews, from their father Abraham to their utter diſperſion, I cannot recollect the exiſtence of any one diſtinguiſhed Old Maid; nor is it probable, that many ancient virgins were ever to be diſcovered, in a nation where every man was at liberty to marry as many wives as he thought himſelf able to ſupport;

port; and where the wiſeſt of their princes was ſo weak as to encumber himſelf with a domeſtic eſtabliſhment of many hundred concubines.

As the Ægyptians were diſtinguiſhed by a melancholy caſt of temper, and a paſſion for gloomy retirement, we might be led to imagine, that the women of that country were the firſt who devoted themſelves to the mortifications of religious celibacy; but there is a remarkable aſſertion in Herodotus, which ſeems to preclude us from ſuch a conjecture. In ſpeaking of Ægypt, he expreſsly ſays, "* no woman is ever "conſecrated to any Divinity, male or fe-"male, the holy office belonging ſolely to "men;" yet the ſame great hiſtorian informs us, that women acted a principal part in the hallowed myſteries of this artful people; not, indeed, as we may fairly conjecture, for the purpoſes of chaſtity, as he

* Ιρηται γυνη μεν ουδεμιη ουτε ερσενος θεω, ουτε θηλεης· ανδρες δε παντων τε και πασεων. Herodotus, p. 120. edit. Weſſel.

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* Ιρηται γυνη μεν ουδεμιη ουτε ερσενος θεω, ουτε θηλεης· ανδρες δε παντων τε και πασεων. Herodotus, p. 120. edit. Weſſel.

ſays,

ſays, that in the temple of the Ægyptian Jupiter at Thebes, as in that of Belus at Babylon, a virgin was ſecluded for the God, and ſuppoſed to ſleep with the Divinity himſelf, in a magnificent bed prepared for that purpoſe, in the higheſt apartment of the building. From this ceremony, and from other circumſtances, we may conclude, that Ægypt was not very fertile in the production of Old Maids. Parents of the poorer ſort ſold their female children to procure ſubſiſtence for themſelves; and we cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe, that many ancient virgins exiſted in ſuch a country, where two of its ſovereigns, according to the hiſtorian I have quoted, proſtituted their own daughters in the moſt public manner; the firſt, to ſupply his exhauſted treaſury; and the ſecond, to detect a very artful thief *.

If we muſt not expect to find an Old Maid in Ægypt, we have ſtill leſs chance of

* See the amuſing ſtory of Rhampſinitus and his daughter, in the ſecond book of Herodotus.

meeting

meeting with this rarity among the Babylonians. This ingenious people had deviſed a very happy expedient, which is highly approved by Herodotus, to prevent their women's being expoſed to the mortifications of a ſingle life, by the want of perſonal attractions. It was their annual cuſtom to produce all their virgins, who had attained the marriageable age, in a kind of public auction; the moſt beautiful were ſold for conſiderable ſums, and this purchaſe money was diſtributed in ſuch a manner, among the homely damſels, as to procure for each of them a huſband. Such a civil inſtitution is in itſelf almoſt ſufficient to have prevented the exiſtence of an Old Maid among them.

In Phœnicia, where Venus and Adonis were particularly worſhipped, the commerce between the ſexes was extremely licentious. We may, indeed, obſerve, that among ſeveral nations of antiquity, the ſacrifice of female chaſtity was conſidered as a religious duty. Perſons of the higheſt rank among

the Armenians, as we are told by Strabo, devoted their virgin daughters to the unchaſte goddeſs Anaitis *.

The pagan mythology was calculated to promote the moſt corrupt ſtate of manners; and in ſome of the voluptuous nations of antiquity, the virtue of continence ſeems to have been utterly unknown. In Lydia, ſays Herodotus, every girl plays the harlot.—Yet, in the luxurious region of Aſia, ſome religious inſtitutions were eſtabliſhed for the protection of chaſtity. The famous temple of Diana, at Epheſus, had a train of holy virgins; and, for their perfect ſecurity, the prieſts, to whoſe guardianſhip they were entruſted, were all eunuchs. Yet we cannot venture to affirm, that this ſanctuary produced a number of Old Maids; for it is probable, that theſe young votaries of Diana, like the Veſtals of Rome, whoſe

* Τας θυγατερας οι επιφανεστατοι τω εθνως ανιερωσι παρθενως, αις νομος εστι, καταπορνευθεισαις πολυν χρονον παρα τη θεω, μετα ταυτα διδοσθαι γαμον· ουκ απαξιωντος τη τοιαυτη συνοικειν ουδενος. Strabo, lib. xi.

hiſtory

hiſtory I ſhall conſider hereafter, had the privilege of marrying towards the middle ſeaſon of life. This we may alſo conjecture to have been the caſe with the religious virgins in Perſia; who ſeem to have been guarded with peculiar ſanctity, from an anecdote related by Juſtin:—Darius, the ſon of Artaxerxes, not ſatisfied with thoſe imperial honours to which his father had raiſed him, demanded of that monarch his favourite miſtreſs Aſpaſia. The aged ſovereign, unwilling to grant, and afraid, perhaps, to refuſe, the paſſionate requeſt of his ſon, was reduced to a mortifying expedient for ſecuring the lady from ſo dangerous a rival: he made her for that purpoſe, a prieſteſs of the Sun *. Plutarch relates this incident with ſome variations, but in a manner which equally ſhews, that chaſtity among the Perſians was very ſtrictly guarded in a religious aſylum; yet virginity, as the ſtory ſufficiently proves, was

* Juſtin.

not a neceſſary qualification for the character of a prieſteſs.—Among all the kingdoms of antiquity, none, perhaps, contributed leſs than Perſia to the ſiſterhood of Old Maids, as the Perſians are diſtinguiſhed by a peculiar ceremony, which ſtrongly proves, that both ſexes conſidered celibacy as an object of abhorrence, not only as an enemy to human enjoyment, but as precluding them from the happineſs they expected in a future life. From this idea aroſe their extraordinary cuſtom of marrying the dead; which conſiſted of hiring either a huſband or a wife, for every perſon who happened to die ſingle, at an early period of life. This ſtrange kind of marriage is ſaid to have been generally ſolemniſed, in ſuch caſes, ſoon after the burial of the deceaſed, being regarded as a neceſſary paſſport to the regions of bliſs.

In Scythia, perhaps, ſome good Old Maids may have exiſted; whoſe ſingle life was the conſequence of their poſſeſſing a delicate frame or a tender heart; for we

are

are told by hiſtorians, that no female, in that martial country, was permitted to marry, till ſhe had ſlain, with her own hand, an enemy in battle.

Among the warlike Amazons, a very different cauſe might produce the ſame effect. As theſe formidable ladies made it a point of national honour to ſupport their empire with the leaſt poſſible aſſiſtance from the other ſex, we may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that ſhe was conſidered as the trueſt Amazonian patriot, who united virginity with valour. I muſt, indeed, confeſs, that the amorous adventures of ſome Amazonian queens are not very favourable to this hypotheſis; but, if Quintus Curtius informs us, that Thaleſtris requeſted an embrace from Alexander, and diſcovered more * eagerneſs for amorous pleaſure than the young and voluptuous hero himſelf, let us remember the more chaſte deportment of her predeceſſor on the Amazonian throne,

* Acrior ad Venerem fœminæ cupido quam regis. Quint. Curt. lib. vi. cap. 5.

the celebrated Pentheſilea, who lived and died a virgin, in the licentious court and army of Priam, during the ſiege of Troy. She was ſlain, as Quintus Calaber relates, by the inflexible Achilles; who wiſhed, however, as the poet ſays, that he had married his lovely antagoniſt inſtead of killing her *. From the example of this virtuous heroine, I am perſuaded, that if a conſiderable number of Old Maids exiſted among any of thoſe ancient people, whom the Greeks regarded as barbarians, it muſt have been in the nation of Amazons. I am aware, that in the profound reſearches of Mr. Bryant, the very exiſtence of this nation is diſputed; but, as the champion of the ſiſterhood in all ages, I cannot aſſent to this opinion of a moſt learned writer, nor permit the daring antiquarian to annihilate ſo illuſtrious a community.

* Και δ' Αχιλευς αλιαστον εω ενετειρετο θυμω
Ουνεκα μιν κατεπεφνε, και ουκ αγε διαν ακοιτιν.
Quintus Calaber, lib. 1. ver. 670.

While

young women, whoſe beauty was ſo powerful as to fix every beholder in motionleſs amazement; others have ſuppoſed them to have been frightful old hags, whoſe deformity was ſo hideous, that no one could look at them without ſhuddering; and ſome late writers, with a ſceptical refinement, have denied their exiſtence: But, to ſupport the ancient dignity of the ſiſterhood, I ſhall adhere to the evidence of that very reſpectable old Grecian, Palæphatus, who wrote a treatiſe expreſsly to explain the poetical riddles of his country; in which he explicitly declares, that the three princely Gorgon ſiſters, Stheno, Euryale, and Meduſa, were three voluntary Old Maids *.

* Κορας τρεις Σθενω, Ευρυαλην, και Μεδουσαν. Αυται μεν γαμασθαι ουδενι εβουληθησαν. Palæphatus.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

On the Old Maids of Greece.

IN thoſe ages which are honoured with the name of heroic, virgins ſeem to have been treated with very little reſpect. Every hero appears to have thought himſelf entitled to the careſſes of the maiden captives, whom his own proweſs, or the chance of war, had placed within his power; and the venerable Neſtor, at the age of fourſcore and five, does not retire to ſleep without that agreeable reward of ancient heroiſm, a fair and affectionate damſel. The warm and enthuſiaſtic admiration with which critics of the moſt liberal ſpirit have contemplated the genius of Homer, has led ſome of them to aſſert, that his poems are ſo wonderfully comprehenſive, as to include every character which human life can exhibit.

But this praiſe may be conſidered as hyperbolical; ſince it is certain, that we cannot diſcover, either in the Iliad or the Odyſſey, a portrait, or even a ſketch, of a ſingle Old Maid. Perhaps, as this immortal bard is ſo minutely faithful in his delineation of manners and cuſtoms, we might infer, that no ſuch character exiſted in his time; and indeed, the more we reflect on the religious and political inſtitutions of Greece, the more reaſon ſhall we find to believe, that the number of Grecian Old Maids muſt have been at all periods very inconſiderable.

It was the ruling paſſion of the Greeks to aggrandize their country; and, as they juſtly conſidered citizens as the real wealth of every ſtate, they thought it the firſt of patriotic duties, equally incumbent on both the ſexes, to enrich the republic by increaſing its numbers. Plato carries this point ſo far as to ſay, that "all perſons, in the "article of marriage, ought to conſult the "ſervice of the public, in preference to "their

" their own private enjoyment *." The ſame illuſtrious philoſophic ſtateſman propoſes a heavy tax upon thoſe who continued ſingle beyond the age of thirty-three. Such a tax is ſaid to have exiſted at Sparta, where every public inſtitution had a peculiar tendency to encourage population. " Their public dances" (ſays Plutarch) " and other exerciſes of the young maidens " naked, in ſight of the young men, were in- " centives to marriage; and, to uſe Plato's " expreſſion, drew them almoſt as neceſ- " ſarily by the attractions of love, as a ge- " ometrical concluſion follows from the " premiſes. To encourage it ſtill more, " ſome marks of infamy were ſet upon " thoſe that continued batchelors; for they " were not permitted to ſee theſe exerciſes " of the naked virgins, and the magiſtrates " commanded them to march naked round " the market-place in the winter, and to

* Κατα παντος εις εστω μυθος λαμου: τον γαρ τη πολει δει συμφεροντα μνηστευειν γαμον εκαστον, ου τον ηδιστον αυτω. Plato de Legibus, lib. vi.

" ſing

" ſing a ſong compoſed againſt themſelves, " which expreſſed how juſtly they were " puniſhed for their diſobedience to the " laws *."

Athenæus informs us, that their puniſhment was ſtill more ſevere; and that, on a certain feſtival, theſe unprofitable ſervants of the ſtate were dragged round an altar, and beaten, by the women of Lacedæmon, that their pride might be awakened by this indignity, and incline them to become huſbands and fathers †.

In a country where ſuch cuſtoms prevailed, it is not probable that many women ſhould have declined the moſt important of public duties, for the ſake of ſecuring to themſelves the diſhonourable tranquillity of a ſingle life. Indeed, we muſt do them the juſtice to obſerve, that the ladies of Greece

* Life of Lycurgus, in Langhorne's Plutarch.

† Εν Λακεδαιμονι φησι τυς αγαμυς αι γυναικες εν εορτη τινι περι τον βωμον ελκυσαι ραπιζυσιν, ινα την εκ τυ πραγματος υβριν φευγοντες, φιλοστοργωσι τε και εν ωρα προσιωσι τοις γαμοις. Athenæus, lib. xiii.

appear to have been, in this point, the ſincereſt of patriots: it ſeems to have been their general ſentiment, that to live and die unmarried was the moſt humiliating diſgrace and affliction that the Deſtinies could inflict.

O the guilty bed
Of thoſe from whom I ſprang! unhappy off-
ſpring
Of parents moſt unhappy! lo! to them
I go accurs'd, a virgin *and a ſlave* *.

— — — — — — — —

Ne'er ſhall I taſte of Hymen's joys, or know
A mother's pleaſures in her infant race;
But, friendleſs and forlorn, alive deſcend
Into the dreary manſions of the dead †.

Franklin's Sophocles.

Such

* Ιω ματρωαι λεκτρων
Αται, κοιμηματ' αυτογενητα
Αμῳ πατρι δυσμορᾳ ματρος,
Οιων εγω ποθ' α ταλαιφρων εφυν.
Προς ᾳς αραιος, αγαμος α-
Δ' εγω μετοικος ερχομαι.

Antigone, ver. 875.

† Και νυν αγει με δια χερων ϐτω λαϐων,
Αλεκτρον, ανυμεναιον, ϐτε τϐ γαμϐ

Μερος

Such is the natural and pathetic lamentation with which the intereſting Antigone of Sophocles prepares for death.—This great and judicious poet has given exactly the ſame ſentiment to his more fiery Electra; who, at the time ſhe is mourning for her murdered father, and meditating the moſt tremendous vengeance againſt her imperious and guilty mother, cannot refrain from lamenting that ſhe is herſelf

Hopeleſs of children, and of nuptial rites *.

So prevalent was this idea in the mind of every Grecian female.—Euripides carries it ſtill farther, and aſſigns ſimilar language to *his* Electra; though he repreſents her as

Μερος λαχουσαν, ουτε παιδειου τροφης,
Αλλ' ωδ' ερημος προς φιλων η δυσμορος,
Ζωσ' εις θανοντων ερχομαι κατασκαφας.
Ver. 928.

* Ατεκνος
Ταλαιν', ανυμφευτος αιεν οιχνω.
Sophoclis Electra, ver. 166.

actually

actually married, by the tyranny of her parents, to an honeſt labourer, who generouſly abſtains from her bed in deference to her rank.

From theſe examples we may conclude, that a Grecian female hardly ever expreſſed an inclination to become an Old Maid; and indeed, whatever her own private wiſhes might be, the iniquitous laws of her country made her ſo much the ſlave of her relations, that ſhe had little or no power of fixing her own ſituation in life. "Nothing (ſays the accompliſhed Sir William Jones, in ſpeaking of Grecian laws that relate to women) "nothing can be conceived more cruel "than the ſtate of vaſſalage, in which wo-"men were kept by the poliſhed Athe-"nians; who might have boaſted of their "tutelar goddeſs, Minerva, but had cer-"tainly no pretenſions, on any account, to "the patronage of Venus. All unneceſ-"ſary reſtraints upon love (which contri-"butes ſo largely to relieve the anxieties "of a laborious life) and upon marriage "(which

" (which conduces ſo eminently to the peace
" and good order of ſociety) are odious in
" the higheſt degree; yet at Athens, whence
" arts, laws, humanity, learning, and reli-
" gion, are ſaid to have ſprung, a girl
" could not be legally united with the ob-
" ject of her affection, except by the con-
" ſent of the Κυριος or controller, who was
" either her father or her grandſire, her
" brother or her guardian: their domination
" over her was transferred to the huſband,
" by whom ſhe was uſually confined to the
" minute details of domeſtic œconomy;
" and from whom ſhe might in ſome in-
" ſtances be torn, for the ſake of her fortune,
" by a ſecond couſin, whom probably ſhe
" deteſted. Nor was her dependence likely
" to ceaſe; for we may collect from the
" ſpeech on the eſtate of Philoctemon, that
" even a widow was at the diſpoſal of her
" neareſt kinſman; either to be married by
" him, or to be given in marriage, accord-
" ing to his inclination or caprice. Yet
" more; a huſband might bequeath his
" wife,

"wife, like part of his eſtate, to any man "whom he choſe for his ſucceſſor: and the "mother of Demoſthenes was actually left "by will to Aphobus, with a portion of "eighty minas. The form of ſuch a be-"queſt is preſerved in the firſt ſpeech "againſt Stephanus; and runs thus: "This "is the laſt will of Paſio the Acharnean. "I give my wife Archippe to Phormio, with "a fortune of one talent in Peparrhetus, one "talent in Attica, a houſe worth a hundred "minas, together with the female ſlaves, "the ornaments of gold, and whatever elſe "may be in it."—For all theſe hardſhips "which the Athenian women endured, a "very poor compenſation was made by "the law of Solon, which ordered their "huſbands to ſleep with them three times "a month *."

In a country where women, at every period of their life, were ſo miſerably dependent as to be diſpoſed of like inanimate pro-

* Jones's Commentary on Iſæus, page 177.

perty,

perty, we have reaſon to apprehend their having ſuffered every ſpecies of cruelty and oppreſſion. If Greece did not abound in voluntary Old Maids, we may believe that ſome lovely females of that celebrated region were kept in a wretched ſtate of celibacy, by the iniquity of a tyrannical parent or guardian. If a ſuperſtitious and cowardly old father happened to dream that a grand-child would prove fatal to his peace, he probably imitated the abſurd precaution of Acriſius, and attempted to confine his daughter, like Danae, in *a ſubterranean chamber on a bed of braſs* *; ſince cowardice and ſuperſtition are not to be corrected by the inſtructive hiſtory of that beautiful captive, and old men are even yet to learn, that female chaſtity is more endangered than protected by a rigorous confinement.

However frequent ſuch examples of parental perſecution may have been among the

* Καταγαιον οικοδομημα, επ' αυτο δε ην ο χαλκους θαλαμος. Pauſanias, p. 164.

Greeks,

Greeks, we do not find many traces of them in the hiſtory of that intereſting, capricious people. There is indeed an amuſing anecdote in Herodotus, which may ſerve to ſhew, that parents uſed to threaten their children with the dreaded continuance of a virgin life. Polycrates of Samos, being angry with his daughter for oppoſing his viſit to the Perſian noble, Orætes, becauſe ſhe had been alarmed by a terrific viſion, threatens the affectionate but teazing girl, that if he returns in ſafety, ſhe ſhall for a long time remain a virgin; to which ſhe replies with great filial tenderneſs, by praying that his threat may be accompliſhed, ſince ſhe would rather remain a virgin * *ſome time longer*, than be utterly deprived of her father.

We may, however, believe that parental tyranny was not ſo often exerciſed in attempts to keep a daughter ſingle, as in thoſe of marrying her to a perſon ſhe abhorred. Perhaps in the latter caſe there was the greater

* Πλεω χρονον. Herodotus, lib. iii.

probability of her becoming an Old Maid; not from the ſpirit of contradiction, but becauſe an unhappy girl, ſo perſecuted, had no reſource to ſhield her from a deteſted marriage, but the ſacred altar of ſome maidenly power, who offered an aſylum to virgins in diſtreſs.

That ſuch places of refuge exiſted, we have a very ſtriking proof in a paſſage of that ſingular poem, the Caſſandra of Lycophron. The propheteſs, in the midſt of her misfortunes, breaks forth into the following declaration of her future glory:

Nor among mortals ſhall my name become
Extinct, and in Lethean darkneſs loſt:
To me the Daunian chiefs, and thoſe who dwell
Within the walls of marſhy Dardanus,
Shall build a temple upon Salpe's banks;
There ſhall the virgins, whenſoe'er they wiſh
To fly the marriage yoke, averſe to join
With ſuitors, vain of their Hectorean locks *,
Or

* It is worthy of obſervation, that Caſſandra conſiders perſonal vanity in a man, as a blemiſh not inferior

Or mark'd with ſome defect of form or birth,
There ſhall they fold my image in their arms,
Their firmeſt guard from nuptial tyranny *.

I think it proper to add, that Caſſandra, in promiſing this aſylum to perſecuted virgins, mentions a circumſtance, which might leſſen, perhaps, the influence of her protection: ſhe declares, that her chaſte votaries

ferior to deformity. As to Hectorean locks, the learned are not perfectly agreed on the manner in which the hair of Hector was dreſſed: but the ingenious editor of Lycophron ſeems to have fairly proved, that the Trojan hero ſet the faſhion of wearing a *toupee*.

* Ου μην εμον νωνυμον ανθρωποις σεβας
Εσται, μαρανθεν ανθι ληθαιω σκοτω·
Ναον δε μοι τευξεσι Δαυνιων ακροι
Σαλπης παρ' οχθαις, οι τε Δαρδανον πολιν
Ναιεσι, λιμνης αγχιτερμονες ποτων.
Κερραι δε παρθενειον εκφυγειν ζυγον
Οταν θελωσι, νυμφιους αρνουμεναι
Τας Εκτορειαις ηγλαισμενας κομαις,
Μορφης εχοντας σιφλον, η μωμαρ γενος,
Εμον περιπλυξεσιν ωλεναις, βρετας,
Αλκαρ μεγιστον κτωμεναι νυμφευματων.

Lycophron, ver. 1126.

muſt disfigure their faces with a medica lotion, and dreſs themſelves in the habit of the Furies. Whether, after annexing this condition to her patronage, ſhe was likely or not to have many virgins in her ſanctuary, is a point that I ſubmit to the judgment of the ladies: obſerving, however, that none of my fair readers are proper judges of the queſtion, except thoſe, who have been perſecuted by the addreſſes of a very odious ſuitor.

From the preceding part of this chapter, ſome readers of a ſceptical caſt may be inclined to doubt, if Greece ever produced an Old Maid. But if the teſtimony of a poet may be admitted, the queſtion is explicitly decided. That the character really exiſted at Athens, we are expreſsly informed by Ariſtophanes, in a verſe which I have adopted as a motto to this Eſſay; and which, for the ſake of my curious fair readers, I ſhall now tranſlate: endeavouring, at the ſame time, to collect as much light as I can from its comic author, concerning

cerning the real condition of Attic Old Maids.

In the comedy, which bears the name of Lyſiſtrata, that lady conceives the lively project of inſtructing her own ſex to obtain an abſolute dominion over the men; and to force them into a concluſion of thoſe wars, by which Greece was perpetually diſtracted. As ſhe propoſes her pacific expedient with more wit than modeſty, my fair readers will undoubtedly approve my delicacy in not giving them a minute account of it; and the more ſo, as it is ſufficient for our preſent purpoſe to obſerve, that Lyſiſtrata, after touching on the vexations that war produces to married women, proceeds to the following ſentiment of diſintereſted compaſſion;

But let us wave OUR GRIEVANCES:—*I grieve*
For virgins in their chambers waxing old *.

* ——— Καθ' ημετερον μεν εκτε.
Περι τωνδε κορων εν τοις θαλαμοις γηρασκεσων ανιωμαι.

It is very remarkable, that although Lyſiſtrata thus mentions the Old Maids as objects of her ſolicitude, the poet does not venture to introduce upon the ſtage a ſingle elderly virgin, either in this play, or in a drama, where he had, I think, a ſtill fairer occaſion to diſplay the character with all his licentious vivacity: I mean his comedy of the *Female Orators* *. A very ſhort account of this witty, but indecent compoſition, will be ſufficient to ſhew, that an Old Maid might have appeared among the perſons of the drama with a very comic effect. Ariſtophanes undoubtedly intended, in this comedy, to ridicule the political whimſies of Plato, who contends, in his Republic, that property and women ſhould be poſſeſſed in common. The poet exhibits, with infinite humour, the ludicrous evils ariſing from ſuch a ſyſtem. The women of Athens uſurp the government; and Praxagora, the heroine of the comedy, adopting

* ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΖΟΥΣΑΙ.

the

the ideas of Plato, eſtabliſhes a new ſet of laws. I ſhall ſpeak only of that which relates to my ſubject. By one of her ſtatutes, "it is enacted, that no young man ſhall re-"ceive the favours of a young woman, till "he has firſt gratified the inclinations of an "old one." The modern reader might expect the poet to introduce, after this incident, even *a chorus of Old Maids*; but, licentious as he was, Ariſtophanes had more reſpect for the ſiſterhood. It is true, indeed, that he brings ſome elderly ladies on the ſtage, and repreſents them not a little ſolicitous to take advantage of a law ſo expreſs in their favour; but they are very far from appearing in the character of Old Maids, as one of them gives us clearly to underſtand, that ſhe has no claim to that title.

I would by no means inſinuate, that the remarkable conduct of Ariſtophanes, in not exhibiting an Old Maid, might tempt us to ſuſpect, that no ſuch character exiſted in his time. The only inference I would draw from it is this: that the Old Maids of

Athens were either entirely ſequeſtered from ſociety, or guarded with ſuch a religious veneration, as the moſt licentious of comic poets preſumed not to violate. That ſuch perſonages really exiſted, I not only think the ſpeech of Lyſiſtrata a ſufficient proof; but I apprehend their condition, as ſhe intimates, was owing to the frequency of war among the Grecian republics.

How far the women of this martial country conſidered themſelves as neglected and aggrieved by that contentious ſpirit, which detained their warriors in diſtant fields of battle, we have a memorable example in the following very ſingular anecdote recorded by Strabo.

"To revenge the death of their king, "Teleclus, who was ſlain as he went to ſa-"crifice at Meſſena, the Lacedæmonians "engaged in a war againſt the Meſſenians, "and took an oath, either that they would "not return home till they had taken "Meſſena, or that they would all die in the "attempt.

"In

"In marching forth to this enterprize, "they left only their very young and very "old citizens to guard their own city. After "the tenth year of the war, the women of "Lacedæmon aſſembled, and ſent a depu- "tation of their own ſex to the army, to "reprove the men, as not engaging on "equal terms with the Meſſenians; ſince "theſe, remaining in their own country, "were ſtill producing children; while they, "who had left their women deſolate, were "encamped in a ſtate of hoſtility, at the "riſk of letting their own country decay "by a deficiency of men. The Lacedæ- "monians ſtill reſpecting their oath, inge- "niouſly contrived to purſue their remote "military object, and at the ſame time pro- "vide for the population of their coun- "try *."

In

* Προσεταξαν δε συγγινεσθαι ταις παρθενοις απασαις απαντας ηγουμενοι πολυτεκνησειν μαλλον. Strabo, lib. vi.

I have followed Strabo in this ſingular hiſtory: but as it is related alſo by Juſtin, with ſome variations, I ſhall inſert his account of it in this note, for

In a ſtate, where the women could preſent ſo tender, ſo patriotic, and ſo ſucceſsful a remonſtrance to their abſent heroes, we

for the ſatisfaction of the curious reader. " His " igitur moribus ita brevi civitas (*Lacedæmon*) con- " valuit, ut cum Meſſeniis, propter ſtupratas virgines " ſuas, in ſolenni Meſſeniorum ſacrificio bellum in- " tuliſſent, graviſſima ſe exſecratione obſtrinxerint, " non, prius quam Meſſenam expugnaſſent, reverſu- " ros; tantum ſibi vel de viribus ſuis, vel de for- " tuna, ſpondentes. Quæ res initium diſſentionis " Græciæ, et inteſtini belli cauſa et origo fuit. Ita- " que cum, contra præſumptionem ſuam, annis decem " in obſidione urbis tenerentur, et querelis uxorum " poſt tam longam viduitatem revocarentur; veriti " ne hac perſeverantia belli graviùs ſibi quam Meſſe- " niis nocerent — quippe illis quantum juventutis " bello intercidat, mulierum fœcunditate ſuppleri; " ſibi et belli damna aſſidua, et fœcunditatem uxo- " rum, abſentibus viris, nullam eſſe — itaque legunt " juvenes ex eo genere militum qui poſt jusjurandum " in ſupplementum venerant, quibus, Spartam re- " miſſis, promiſcuos omnium feminarum concubitus " permiſere; maturiorem futuram conceptionem rati, " ſi eam ſingulæ per plures viros experirentur. Ex " his nati, ob notam materni pudoris, Partheniæ " vocati."

Juſtin. lib. iii. c. 4.

cannot,

cannot, I think, reaſonably ſuppoſe that the number of Old Maids was very conſiderable. Perhaps in this point, as in all others of delicacy and refinement, Sparta was confeſſedly inferior to Athens. As the latter was more eminently diſtinguiſhed by the patronage of the virgin goddeſs Minerva, we may juſtly believe her to have furniſhed to her guardian deity the more numerous train of elderly and immaculate votaries.

The mythological deſcriptions of the Grecian poets are generally founded on ſome hiſtorical fact; and the poem of Nonnus contains a very remarkable paſſage, which almoſt perſuades me, that the women of Greece, at ſome early and obſcure period of their hiſtory, were ſo vehemently devoted to the arts of Minerva, that they neglected or renounced the more intereſting rites of Venus, and almoſt endangered the continuance of the world. As the paſſage, to which I allude, has the advantage of exhibiting Venus in a new point of view, it may amuſe the reader to ſee it at full length. The poet having

having informed us that his hero, Bacchus, gave a banquet to his attendants, proceeds thus:

* *To this gay audience, as the goblet paſs'd,*
Leucus the ſelf-taught Leſbian fram'd the ſong
Of Titans arm'd 'gainſt Heaven: joyous be ſung
The triumph of high-judging Jove; and how
In the dark caves of Tartarus he pent
Old Saturn, ſtealing his avenging fire,
And vainly cas'd in winter's watery helm.
But mild Lapethus, earth's pacific ſon,
Sat near the ſkilful bard; and from the feaſt
Gave him the choiceſt dainty: then requir'd
The ſweet and favourite ſong, that well deſcribes
The Cyprian Goddeſs at the loom employ'd,
And vying with the blue-eyed Queen of Arts.
He with ſweet prelude ſung, how Venus, touch'd
With paſſion for the works of manual ſkill,
Held in unpractis'd hands Minerva's web,
And the light ceſtus of the Loves exchang'd
For the laborious ſhuttle. Coarſe the thread

* Τρισι δε τερπομενοισι, &c. Nonni Dionyſ. lib. 24.

The

The Paphian Goddeſs ſpun—ſcarce of leſs ſize
Than the groſs cordage, which of willow fram'd
With ſome rude art, the old mechanic us'd
To ſplice the timber of his new-built bark.
She thro' the day, and thro' the night, intent
Hung o'er the loom of Pallas, and rejoic'd
In the new labour, foreign to her hand.
Frequent ſhe ſmooth'd the veſt; and having pois'd
The dangling weights, her growing web ſhe plied,
Solicitous to play Minerva's part.
Nor trifling was her toil: but in her work
The maſſive thread projected: of itſelf
The woof of her enormous texture broke.
And of her double labour now ſhe made
The ſun a witneſs, and the conſcious moon.
Part of her ſportive train around her danc'd
Amuſive: with a gay and rapid hand
Paſiphae turn'd the wheel; while Pitho's care
Smooth'd the rough wool; and ſweet Aglaia's zeal
Gave to their common Queen the ready thread.

Now

Now mortal life declin'd, and harmony,
Once the glad harbinger of bridal joy,
Mourn'd the neglect of marriage — hopeleſs
Love
Loos'd from his bow his ineffectual ſtring,
Viewing the barren unplough'd field of life.
No dulcet flute then ſounded, no ſhrill pipe
Uſher'd with feſtive glee the Nuptial God;
But earthly being waſted, and the chain
Of wedlock, that ſuſtains the world, diſſolv'd.
Minerva now her buſy rival ſaw;
In anger mix'd with tenderneſs ſhe view'd
The thick rough threads of the unſkilful fair:
Now ſhe inform'd the Gods, and ſpoke in ſcorn
Accuſing Venus, and her father Jove:—
" Thy ordinance is chang'd, Celeſtial Sire!
" Nor can I keep what all the Fates conſpir'd
" To make my portion: tempted by my loom,
" Thy daughter Venus now invades my right.
" 'Tis not the ſiſter and the wife of Jove,
" 'Tis not our ſovereign Juno, that uſurps
" Minerva's province: no; this wrong is
" done
" To the immortal Patroneſs of Arms

" *By the ſoft Queen of Dalliance. For thy*
" *Heaven*
" *When did th' unwarlike Cytherea fight?*
" *Where are the Titans by her ceſtus ſlain,*
" *That ſhe inſults thy warrior?—Dian! ſay,*
" *When in the centre of thy ſacred grove*
" *Haſt thou beheld Minerva lead the chace?*
" *Or who in child-birth calls the Blue-eyed*
" *Queen?*"

She ſpoke, and th' inhabitants of Heaven
Aſſembled, eager for the wondrous ſight
Of Venus at the loom.—Soon as they ſaw
The produce of her hand, unus'd to toil,
Scornful they roll'd the ſpurious work aſide,
And with a ſmile ſarcaſtic Hermes ſaid:
" *Thine is the diſtaff: to Minerva leave*
" *Thy uſeleſs ceſtus!—Since thy arm has*
" *ſtrength*
" *Nimbly to dart the flying ſhuttle, take*
" *The ſpear and ægis of the Martial Maid!*
" *I know why Venus plies th' applauded loom:*
" *Thy wiles eſcape not me—thy bridegroom*
" *Mars*

" *Quick*

" *Quick from thy hand with amorous haſte*
" *requires*
" *A veſt of nuptial elegance: —for Mars*
" *Form the rich robe; but in thy recent work*
" *Weave not the lance, for what are arms to*
" *thee?*
" *No! let thy variegated tints diſplay*
" *The Light-diſperſing God, whoſe beams re-*
" *veal'd*
" *Thy latent paramour: or, if thou wilt,*
" *Frame thy old chains, and let thy modeſt hand*
" *Paint in thy glowing web thy ſpurious lord!*
" *And thou too, Love, a diſtaff for thy arms,*
" *For thy laborious mother twiſt the yarn,*
" *That I may ſee the light-wing'd boy at work,*
" *His bow a ſpindle, and his dart a thread!*
" *With golden Venus 'broider Mars in gold;*
" *And let him bear a ſhuttle for his ſhield,*
" *Weaving himſelf with Beauty's buſy Queen!*
" *But rather, Venus, from thy lovely hand*
" *Toſs to the wind thy threads!— thy ceſtus*
" *take,*
" *And o'er th' enjoyments of the earth again*
" *Preſide!*

" Preſide! for nature ſuffers, and the world
" Wanders forlorn, while thou art at the loom."
Thus as he ſpoke th' Olympian ſynod ſmil'd;
And, caſting far aſide th' unfiniſh'd web
In reverence to Pallas, Beauty's Queen,
Kind cheriſher of man's increaſe, retir'd
To her own Cyprus—from her ceſtus Love
Beſtow'd new charms on nature's varying form,
And richly ſow'd the well-plough'd waſte of life.
Such was the carol of the Leſbian bard
On Cytherea, in the loom unſkill'd,
Vying with Pallas, patroneſs of arts.

I rejoice in being able to enliven and illuſtrate this philoſophical Eſſay, by ſo appoſite a paſſage from the very poet, however obſcure, from whom Mr. Bryant has ſtruck ſo much light in his profounder reſearches. I have given almoſt a literal tranſlation of the preceding ſong; and I flatter myſelf that my candid readers, who are familiar with the deciſive ſtyle of our antiquarians, will allow me to conſider it as a *ſtriking proof*, that a confederacy of very beautiful ancient ſpinſters was once formed in Greece, who

reſolutely devoted themſelves to the quiet labour of the loom, inſtead of aſſiſting in the more important buſineſs of forming new citizens to ſupport their country. Evident as this point muſt appear from theſe remarkable verſes, it might puzzle, perhaps, even the very learned gentleman juſt mentioned, to decide at what period of the Grecian hiſtory theſe ſpinſters lived, and how long they perſiſted in their dangerous reſolution. From the concluſion of the ſong I am inclined to believe, that they reſembled a certain ſociety of modern ladies, under the guidance of a ſeraphic preſident, intitled Madonella; a lady whoſe adventures are related with infinite humour in the firſt volume of the Tatler, and who, having devoted herſelf and her aſſociates to a life of virgin purity and retirement, was rapidly and ingeniouſly induced to take an active part in the neceſſary increaſe of the world.

My deſire to do all poſſible honour to the ſiſterhood, has made me extremely ſolicitous to diſcover every Attic Old Maid,

Maid, whoſe name might reflect a luſtre on the community: but in my hiſtorical enquiries for this purpoſe, I have not been ſo ſucceſsful as I expected to be. Many Grecian ladies have been celebrated for an attachment to philoſophical ſtudies: and I concluded that, in the liſt of theſe, I ſhould find ſeveral individuals, who in chaſtity as well as learning were the faithful votaries of Minerva. Monſieur Menage has compiled, with extenſive erudition, a little hiſtory of all the female philoſophers, of whom any traces can be found in the writings of the ancients. Their number amounts to ſixty-five; but it is very remarkable, that if we except St. Catherine, there is only one lady in this long catalogue, who is celebrated for her virginity; and how far that might be either real or meritorious may ſtill be a queſtion, as this lady did not live ſingle, but was the wife of the philoſopher Iſidorus.

Thus diſappointed among the ancient female profeſſors of philoſophy, I reflected with ſingular pleaſure, that thoſe more

venerable poetical old ladies, the Sibyls, would ſupply this defect; and of all the Old Maids that antiquity could furniſh, I conſidered them as beſt entitled to the honourable diſtinction of being claſſed at the head of the ſiſterhood. I imagined their title to this high rank to be fully confirmed by the ſentence of St. Jerome; who, ſpeaking of them, in the firſt part of his eloquent invective againſt Jovinian, expreſsly ſays, that "virginity was their characteriſtic, "and divination the reward of their virgi-"nity *." But, examining the hiſtory of theſe reverend ladies with that attention which it deſerves, I ſoon perceived that the fervent and generous ſaint had given them credit for a quality, which they were very far from poſſeſſing. The learned Servatius Gallæus, who has obliged the world with a thick quarto volume on thoſe intereſting

* Quid referam Sibyllas Erithræam et Cumanam, et octo reliquas, nam Varro decem fuiſſe autumat, *Quarum inſigne virginitas eſt, et virginitatis præmium divinatio.* Sanct. Hieron. adverſus Jov. p. 185.

females,

females, completely expoſes the miſtake of St. Jerome, and laughs at him as a ridiculous champion, contending for the chaſtity of a harlot. Nor can we wonder that the credulity of the candid ſaint ſhould be treated with deriſion, ſince one of the Sibyls, for whoſe continence he contends, very freely acknowledges, in a remarkable verſe of her own *, that ſhe had formerly indulged herſelf in all the criminal exceſſes of licentious paſſion.

After all my laborious endeavours to inveſtigate the hiſtory of Old Maids in Greece, I muſt cloſe this chapter upon them, with the modeſt ignorance of a Grecian philoſopher, confeſſing all I know is that I know nothing: to the virginity of theſe ancient and perhaps ideal ladies, I may apply the following ingenious ſimile of a great modern poet:

Like following life in creatures we diſſect,
We loſe it in the moment we detect.

* Μυρια μεν μοι λεκτρα, γαμος δ' ουδεις εμεληθη.

CHAP. V.

On the Veſtals, and other Old Maids, of Rome before the Chriſtian Æra.

AS the Roman empire was founded on a rape, and no leſs than ſix hundred and eighty-three Sabine virgins were forcibly converted into wives, according to the account of that accurate antiquarian Dionyſius of Halicarnaſſus, we cannot expect to meet with many Old Maids in the early periods of the Roman hiſtory. Indeed, in the firſt ages of the republic, the patriotic ambition of the Romans, and the expreſs letter of their law, operated with equal force againſt a life of celibacy. Cicero, in the opening of his third book, *De Legibus*, has given us the very words of the ſtatute, by which the cenſors were directed, not only to examine and enroll the children of every Roman family, but to take care

that

that no citizens ſhould lead a ſingle life *; and we learn from a valuable fragment preſerved in Aulus Gellius, that the moſt eminent ſenators of Rome conſidered marriage, not as a ſtate of private enjoyment, but as a public indiſpenſable burthen, which every man was bound to ſupport for the good of the community. As the ſubject is curious and intereſting, I ſhall preſent to my reader not only the fragment to which I allude, but a conſiderable paſſage from the author who has given it a place in his miſcellaneous and amuſing work.

The ſixth chapter, in the firſt book of Aulus Gellius, begins in the following manner:

" The oration which Metellus Numi-
" dicus, a man of dignity and eloquence,
" delivered, in his cenſorſhip, to exhort the
" people to matrimony, was read to a large
" and learned audience. In this oration it
" was thus written: ' If, Romans, we had

* Equitum peditumque prolem deſcribunto: cœlibes eſſe prohibento.

" the power of living without a wife, we " ſhould all be free from that trouble; but " ſince nature has ſo diſpoſed it, that we " can neither live very commodiouſly with " them, nor without them exiſt at all, we " muſt provide rather for perpetual ſecurity, " than for tranſient pleaſure.' It appeared " to ſome, that the cenſor Metellus, whoſe " intention was to exhort the people to " marry, ought not to have made ſuch a " confeſſion concerning the trouble and " perpetual vexations of the married life, " ſince, inſtead of exhorting, he ſeemed ra- " ther to diſſuade and deter. His oration, " they ſaid, ought rather to have taken a " contrary turn; he ſhould have aſſerted, " that marriage in general was attended " with no vexations; and if at any time it " appeared to produce ſome, theſe, he " ſhould have ſaid, were light and trifling, " very eaſily endured, and obliterated by a " ſuperior portion of emolument and de- " light; nay, that theſe very vexations " were neither common to all, nor owing

" to

" to the nature of the connection, but oc-
" caſioned by the failings and injuſtice of
" particular huſbands. But Titus Caſ-
" tricius maintained, that Metellus had
" ſpoken both with truth and propriety.
" It is one thing, ſaid he, to ſpeak as a
" cenſor, and another to ſpeak as a rheto-
" rician. We allow the latter to uſe ex-
" preſſions fraudulent and bold, ſubtile and
" captious, if they have but a certain air of
" truth, and the power of exciting, by any
" artifice, the paſſions of the audience.
" He obſerved, moreover, that it is diſ-
" graceful to a rhetorician, even in a bad
" cauſe, to leave any part of his ground de-
" ſerted and unfought; but for Metellus,
" he ſaid, who ſpoke to the Roman people
" with that ſanctity of character, as a man
" whoſe life had been diſtinguiſhed by ac-
" cumulated honours, it became him to
" utter nothing but what he himſelf, and
" his whole audience, might eſteem ſtrictly
" true; and the more ſo, as he ſpoke upon
" a ſubject, of which the experience of

" every

" every day enabled every man to judge. " Confeſſing, therefore, thoſe vexations " which were notorious to all men, and de- " ſerving, by that confeſſion, the confi- " dence of his auditors, he at laſt, with " eaſe and rapidity, perſuaded them of that " important and eſſential point, that the " preſervation of the ſtate depended on " the prevalence of marriage."

Without ſtopping to make any farther remarks on the eloquence of Metellus—from whoſe honeſt confeſſion we might infer, that the moſt ſpirited of the old Romans were not perfectly able to manage their wives—I ſhall only obſerve, that in the firſt ages of the republic, the cenſors ſeem to have attended very minutely to this part of their office, which had ſo ſtrong a tendency to prevent the exiſtence of Old Maids. Valerius Maximus informs us, that the cenſors Camillus and Poſthumius levied a fine on thoſe citizens who had grown old in a ſingle life, and brought it to the public treaſury. Plutarch alſo, in his

Life of Camillus, relates, that "as the wars "had made many widows, he obliged ſuch "of the men as lived ſingle, partly by per-"ſuaſion, and partly by threatening them "with fines, to marry thoſe widows."— From the latter circumſtance we may infer, that virgins of a marriageable age were at this period very ſcarce in Rome; and, indeed, we may believe, that, in the active patriotic days of the republic, there would not have exiſted a ſingle Roman Old Maid, had not the ſingular religious eſtabliſhment of the veſtal virgins formed a kind of nurſery for that reſpectable ſiſterhood to whom this work is devoted.

As I preſume that my fair readers have but a ſlight acquaintance with theſe moſt intereſting nuns of antiquity, although their name, ſurviving that fire for whoſe eternity they prayed, is ſtill applied in poetical language to modern ladies of diſtinguiſhed purity, I ſhall here inſert the curious account of the Veſtals, which is preſerved in the above-mentioned moſt excellent antiquarian,

quarian, Dionyſius, and I ſhall inſert it in the words of his accurate and elegant tranſlator, Mr. Spelman.

"The virgins, who ſerve the Goddeſs, "were originally four, and elected by the "kings, according to the laws eſtabliſhed "by Numa; but, afterwards, from the "multiplicity of their functions, their "number was increaſed to ſix, and has ſo "remained to this day. They live in the "temple of the Goddeſs, into which none "are hindered from entering in the day-"time; but it is not lawful for any man to "remain there in the night. They are "under a neceſſity of continuing unmar-"ried during the ſpace of thirty years; "which time they employ in offering ſa-"crifices, and performing other rites or-"dained by the law. During the firſt "ten years, their duty was to learn their "functions; in the ſecond ten, to perform "them; and, during the remainder of their "time, to teach others. After the expiration "of the term of thirty years, nothing hin-

"dered

" dered ſuch as deſired it from marrying,
" upon their quitting their veils *, and the
" other enſigns of their prieſthood; and
" ſome, though very few, have done this,
" the end of whoſe lives has not been ſo
" very happy as to tempt others to imitate
" them; ſo that the reſt, looking upon their
" calamities as ominous, remain virgins in
" the temple of the Goddeſs till their death,
" and then the pontiffs again chuſe another
" to ſupply the vacancy. They receive
" many diſtinguiſhing honours from their
" country, by which the deſire of children

* Gellius quotes Antiſtius Labeo, a man of great learning in the time of Auguſtus, for many particulars relating to the Veſtals; among the reſt, that they could not be admitted under ſix, nor above ten years of age. I imagine, becauſe it was neceſſary they ſhould be virgins.——The election was performed in the following manner:—The Pontifex Maximus choſe twenty virgins, who, in an aſſembly of the people, drew lots which of them ſhould ſucceed the deceaſed Veſtal; and the virgin upon whom the lot fell was taken by the Pontifex Maximus.

SPELMAN's Note.

" and

" and of marriage is taken away. They are
" alſo ſubject to great puniſhment in caſe
" of delinquency; which, by the law, the
" pontiffs are appointed both to enquire
" into and puniſh. Thoſe Veſtals who
" commit leſſer crimes, they whip with
" rods; but if they ſuffer themſelves to be
" debauched, they are delivered up by the
" pontiffs to the moſt ſhameful and the
" moſt miſerable death; for, while they
" are yet alive, they are carried upon a
" bier, with all the formality of a funeral,
" their friends and relations attending
" them with lamentations; being arrived
" at the gate Collina, they are placed in a
" ſubterraneous cell, prepared within the
" walls, in their funeral attire, without any
" ſepulchral column, funeral rites, or other
" cuſtomary ſolemnities. There ſeem to
" be many indications of the prieſteſs who
" does not perform the holy functions
" with purity; but the principal is the ex-
" tinction of the fire, which the Romans
" dread above all misfortunes, looking

" upon

" upon it, from whatever cauſe it proceeds,
" as an omen that portends the deſtruction
" of their city; and they bring fire again
" into the temple, with many expiatory
" rites.——It is alſo well worth relating, in
" what manner this Goddeſs has manifeſted
" herſelf in favour of thoſe virgins who
" have been falſely accuſed.—It is ſaid, that
" once the fire being extinguiſhed, through
" ſome careleſſneſs of Æmilia, who had
" then the care of it, and had intruſted it
" to another virgin, who was newly choſen
" into their number, and then learning her
" duty, the whole city was in great diſor-
" der, and an enquiry made by the pon-
" tiffs, whether ſome defilement of the
" prieſteſs might not have occaſioned the
" extinction of the fire. Upon this they
" ſay, that Æmilia, who was innocent,
" but diſtracted at what had happened,
" ſtretched out her hands to the altar, and,
" in the preſence of the prieſts and the reſt
" of the virgins, ſaid, 'O Veſta, tutelary
" Goddeſs of this city, if, during the ſpace

" of

" of near thirty years, I have performed
" the holy functions to thee with holineſs
" and juſtice, and have preſerved a pure
" mind and a chaſte body, appear in my
" defence, and aſſiſt me, and do not ſuffer
" your prieſteſs to die the moſt miſerable of
" all deaths; but if I have been guilty of
" any impiety, let my puniſhment expiate
" the guilt of the city.'—Having ſaid this,
" ſhe tore off a piece of the linen garment
" ſhe had on, and threw it upon the altar.
" After this prayer, they ſay, that from the
" aſhes, which had been long cold, and
" retained no ſpark of fire, a great flame
" ſhone forth through the linen; ſo that the
" city did not ſtand in need, either of expi-
" ations or of a new fire.——But what I am
" going to relate is ſtill more wonderful,
" and more like a fable.—They ſay, that
" ſomebody having falſely accuſed one of
" the virgins, whoſe name was Tucia, and,
" being unable to object to her the extinc-
" tion of the fire, he ſupported his accuſa-
" tion by falſe inductions drawn from
" probable

"probable conjectures and teſtimonies; "and that the virgin, being ordered to "make her defence, ſaid only this—that ſhe "would clear herſelf from the accuſation "by her actions; and, having ſaid this, "and called upon the Goddeſs to be her "guide, ſhe proceeded to the Tiber, the "pontiffs conſenting, and all the citizens "attending her: when ſhe came to the "river, ſhe was ſo hardy as to under-"take a thing, which, of all others, is "looked upon as impoſſible, even to a "proverb; and, having taken water out of "the river in an empty ſieve, and carried "it as far as the Forum, ſhe poured it out "at the feet of the pontiffs; after which, "they ſay, her accuſer, though great en-"quiry was made after him, could never "be found, either alive or dead *."

If ſome of theſe calumniated Veſtals were thus marvellouſly preſerved, others ſeem to have been deſtroyed with the moſt

* Spelman's Dionyſius, vol. i. p. 345.

ſavage barbarity, in ſpite of favourable occurrences that might have been humanely conſtrued into a ſupernatural aſſertion of their innocence. In the rhetorical fragments of Seneca, a fair delinquent is mentioned, who, being convicted of impurity, was brought to ſuffer death, by being thrown from the ſummit of ſo high a rock, that it was terrific even to thoſe who looked down from it in a ſtate of ſecurity *. In the moment preceding her puniſhment, ſhe appealed to Veſta in vindication of her purity; and, being flung from the precipice, deſcended without injury to the ground; when a ſet of inhuman orators maintained, that ſhe ought to be brought back, and thrown a ſecond time from the rock, alledging, that her wonderful eſcape rather indicated the anger than the protection of the Gods, ſince it was their deſign, not to ſave the life of this convicted criminal, but

* Erat altidudo montis etiam ſecurè deſpicientibus horrenda.

to lengthen her puniſhment. Seneca does not inform us, that ſhe periſhed in conſequence of this cruel argument; and, indeed, I am tempted to hope, for the honour of human nature, that the whole ſtory was nothing more than the fiction of a fanciful declaimer.

However this may be, the anecdote affords us a ſtriking proof of the extreme ſeverity with which the Romans regarded the frailty of a Veſtal. Indeed, the ſame author furniſhes us with a proof of this point yet more extraordinary; for he gives us part of a criminal oration againſt a Veſtal, who was accuſed of inceſt, not for any evident act of incontinence, but merely for having written a verſe, which forcibly expreſſed her ſenſe of thoſe pleaſures, which the married fair ones enjoy. This curious morſel of heart-inſpired poetry is happily preſerved, and I muſt gratify my female reader with a tranſlation of it, though I may injure the ſpirit of this feeling poeteſs

by converting her ſingle *Latin* verſe into the following *Engliſh* couplet:

Happy the nymphs who gain the nuptial bed!
O let me die, if 'tis not ſweet to wed * !*

We find, in the auſtere rhetorician, the moſt bitter invective againſt theſe natural ſentiments of a tender female. "How expreſſive," cries the declaimer, "is her language! how apparently flowing from the inmoſt ſoul, not only of an experienced, but of an enraptured woman!—She is guilty of inceſt, though not actually violated, who wiſhes for violation †."

Let me add, however, in juſtice to Seneca, that he gives us alſo the oppoſite ſide of the queſtion. "We confeſs," replies the defender of this poetical virgin, "we confeſs to you, ſhe is guilty of one crime: ſhe is

* *Felices nuptæ! moriar niſi nubere dulce eſt.*

† Quam expreſſa vox, quam ex imis viſceribus emiſſa, non expertæ tantum, ſed delectatæ. Inceſta eſt etiam ſine ſtupro, quæ cupit ſtuprum.

poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed of genius: how then could ſhe fail to envy Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, or that happy parent who gave birth to Cato *?"—We are not told what was the fate of this ingenious Veſtal; and ſhe alſo, like her ſiſter, who is mentioned in the preceding anecdote of the rock, might be a mere creature of fancy, and her offence invented for the exerciſe of declamation.

If our humanity is gratified by this ſuppoſition, yet other ancient writers afford us a melancholy aſſurance, that ſeveral unhappy Veſtals actually ſuffered the ſavage fate of being buried alive. For my own part, when I read of ſuch events, I feel that all the ſplendor of Roman glory is entirely eclipſed by theſe infernal acts of barbarous ſuperſtition. Let me remark, however, for the credit of the republic, that this puniſhment was introduced by the elder Tarquin.

* Unum crimen vobis confiteor: ingenium habet. Quidni invideat Corneliæ, matri Gracchorum? Quidni illi quæ Catonem peperit?

It was firſt inflicted in his reign, upon a hapleſs victim, whoſe name was Pinaria. I ſhall not enumerate all the unfortunate females, who ſhared this inhuman deſtiny, but content myſelf with obſerving, that, according to the calculation of the Abbè Nadal (who has given a copious hiſtory of the Veſtals, in the Memoirs of the French Academy) from the eſtabliſhment of theſe virgins under Numa, to their ſuppreſſion in the reign of Theodoſius, a period of about a thouſand years, we cannot aſſign more to each century than a ſingle victim. As to the number of honeſt and unſuſpected Old Maids, which this religious ſociety might produce in the ſame ſpace of time, this is a point requiring ſo much nice calculation, that I ſhall leave it to be ſettled by our own indefatigable antiquarians.

We may fairly ſuppoſe, that, in ſpite of thoſe unpromiſing omens, by which many of the elder Veſtals were deterred from wedlock, according to the above-mentioned account of Dionyſius, ſome of theſe ſuperannuated

nuated prieſteſſes were eager to aſſert their privilege, and ventured to marry. Indeed we have a ſingular proof that this ſometimes happened, in a few remarkable verſes of the Chriſtian poet Prudentius, who has exhibited a picture of the Veſtals, which is certainly painted with more zeal than politeneſs. As the paſſage is curious, and has not been fully quoted by the modern hiſtorian of theſe intereſting ladies, I ſhall endeavour to amuſe my fair readers by a poetical tranſlation of it.

Now let me ſearch into the Veſtal's fame!
To modeſty's bright crown what ſeals her claim?
The little ſlaves in childhood are immur'd,
Before the judgment of the mind matur'd
Can grow of virgin fame devoutly fond,
And ſpurn the weight of the connubial bond.
On joyleſs altars, which her heart muſt hate,
The captive virgin is condemn'd to wait;
Not ſcorning pleaſure, but from bliſs confin'd,
Untouch'd her body, not untouch'd her mind:

Reſtleſs the bed, on which unlov'd ſhe lies,
And for the loſs of bridal rapture ſighs:
Hope fans this fire: for her the torch may flare,
And nuptial fillets bind her hoary hair;
Since, when thro' ſtated years her vows are paid,
Veſta rejects the antiquated maid:
While fit for nuptial joys, no nuptial kiſs
Enrich'd her boſom with a mother's bliſs;
A veteran Veſtal, now her prieſthood ends,
She quits the altar, on which youth attends,
To Hymen's rites, a wrinkled bride! ſhe's led,
And learns to wanton in an icy bed.*

Though

* *Quæ nunc veſtalis ſit virginitatis honeſtas*
Diſcutiam, qua lege regat decus omne pudoris.
Ac primum parvæ teneris capiuntur in annis,
Ante voluntatis propriæ quam libera ſecta,
Laude pudicitiæ fervens et amore deorum,
Juſta maritandi condemnet vincula ſexus.
Captivus pudor ingratis addicitur aris;
Nec contempta perit miſeris, ſed adempta voluptas
Corporis intacti; non mens intacta tenetur.
Nec requies datur ulla toris, quibus innuba cæcum
Vulnus,

Though the picture, which this pious poet has given us, may be conſidered as a piece of coarſe painting, it was undoubtedly drawn from the life. In one point I fear he judged but too well; I mean, in the general unhappineſs which he attributes to the younger Veſtals. From the time and mode of their introduction into this religious ſervitude, we cannot ſuppoſe that they felt themſelves very eaſy under it, when they grew old enough to acquire a knowledge of ſocial life, and to experience the full force

Vulnus, et amiſſas ſuſpirat fœmina tædas.
Tum quia non totum ſpes ſalva interficit ignem:
Nam reſides quandoque faces adolere licebit,
Feſtaque decrepitis obtendere flammea canis.
Tempore præſcripto membra intemerata requirens,
Tandem virgineam faſtidit Veſta ſenectam.
Dum thalamis habilis tumuit vigor, irrita nullus
Fœcundavit amor materno viſcera partu.
Nubit anus veterana, ſacro perfuncta labore,
Deſertiſque focis, quibus eſt famulata juventus,
Transfert emeritas ad fulcra jugalia rugas,
Diſcit et in gelido nova nupta tepeſcere lecto.
Prudentius in Symmachum, ver. 583.

of

of all the natural paſſions. The Romans ſeem to have been ſenſible of the many mortifications, which muſt have attended the life of theſe lovely captives: and they endeavoured to compenſate the evils of their condition, by frequently increaſing the various honours that were paid to every individual of this holy order. Even the cold-blooded Auguſtus beſtowed upon them ſome marks of his favour; and, as the hiſtorian Dion Caſſius aſſerts, admitted theſe ſequeſtered virgins to the enjoyment of all thoſe civic rights, which the policy of Rome had confined to mothers. Among the many privileges that belonged to the Veſtal, there was one that muſt have been peculiarly delightful to a feeling heart; I mean the privilege of ſaving the condemned. The Romans attached ſuch an idea of ſanctity to the perſon of a Veſtal, that if a criminal, in his way to execution, was fortunate enough to meet one of theſe virgins, the bare ſight of ſo pure a perſonage was ſufficient to expiate his offences, and the happy incident imme-

diately reſtored him to life and liberty. On theſe occaſions, however, it was neceſſary for the prieſteſs to affirm, that ſuch meeting was the mere effect of chance. Yet in the moſt turbulent and ſanguinary days of the republic, the lives of ſome political delinquents have been ſaved by the ſupplication of the Veſtals. The vindictive Sylla himſelf is ſaid to have granted the life of Cæſar to the interceſſion of theſe compaſſionate virgins, highly provoked as he was by the reſiſtance of that ſpirited and ambitious youth. Perhaps the extreme eagerneſs, which Cæſar afterwards ſhewed to obtain the office of ſupreme pontiff, was partly owing to his generous deſire of diſplaying his gratitude to theſe holy virgins, to whoſe tenderneſs he was indebted for his life: for it was the duty of the ſupreme pontiff to ſuperintend this female ſociety; to retire into a place of privacy with every young Veſtal, who had committed any trivial offence, and, having ſtripped the fair delinquent, to ſcourge her in proportion to her demerit.

demerit. It was perhaps in this high office that the celebrated humanity of this merciful tyrant was moſt uniformly exerted; and, however the Roman empire might juſtly murmur at his uſurped authority, when we conſider the characteriſtics of this great man, we may reaſonably conclude, that no tender Veſtal ever thought herſelf much aggrieved by falling under the rod of Cæſar. It had indeed been happy for this tender ſiſterhood, if the ſucceeding emperors had ſuperintended them with that gentle ſpirit, which on ſuch occaſions diſplayed itſelf in this the moſt liberal and moſt accompliſhed of tyrants. But among the many monſters, who ſucceeded this extraordinary uſurper in the government of the Roman world, there were ſome, who appear to have delighted in the horrible enormity of burying even an innocent Veſtal alive. The younger Pliny has related a tranſaction of this kind, in which the ſpirit of the lovely victim appears in ſo intereſting a light, that I ſhall inſert the ſtory in the words of Mr. Melmoth,

moth, that amiable tranſlator, whoſe delicacy of ſentiment, and elegance of language, have placed him on a level with his engaging original.

" Domitian's vengeance generally raged " with the greateſt fury, where his evidence " failed him moſt. That emperor had de- " termined, that Cornelia Maximilla, one " of the Veſtal virgins, ſhould be buried " alive, from an extravagant notion, that " thoſe kind of exemplary ſeverities did " honour to his reign. Accordingly, in " the character of high prieſt, or rather in- " deed in that of a lawleſs and cruel tyrant, " he convened the ſacred college, not in the " pontifical court where they uſually aſ- " ſemble, but at his villa near Alba; and " there (by a ſentence no leſs wicked, as it " was paſſed when ſhe was not preſent to de- " fend herſelf, than as it was the effect of paſ- " ſion and revenge) he condemned her of " having violated her Veſtal vow. Yet he " himſelf had been guilty, not only of de- " bauching his brother's daughter, but was " alſo acceſſary to her death: for that lady

" being

" being a widow, in order to conceal her " ſhame, endeavoured to procure an abor- " tion, and by that means loſt her life. " However, the prieſts were directed to ſee " the ſentence immediately performed upon " Cornelia. As they were leading her to " the place of execution, ſhe called upon " Veſta, and the reſt of the Gods, to atteſt " her virtue; and, amongſt other exclama- " tions, frequently cried out, *Is it poſſible* " *that Cæſar can think me polluted, under the* " *influence of whoſe ſacred functions he has* " *conquered and triumphed?* Whether ſhe " ſaid this in flattery or deriſion; whether " it proceeded from a conſciouſneſs of her " innocence, or contempt of the emperor, " is not certain *; but ſhe continued ex- " claiming in this manner, till ſhe came to " the place of execution; to which ſhe " was led at leaſt like a criminal, though " perhaps not really one. As ſhe was go- " ing down into the ſubterraneous cavern, " her gown hung upon ſomething in the way,

* It was uſual with Domitian to triumph, not only without a victory, but even after a defeat.

" upon

" upon which, turning back to diſengage
" it, the executioner offered her his hand,
" which ſhe refuſed with ſome horror, as
" if ſhe could not touch it without impurity.
" Thus ſhe preſerved the appearance of
" a conſummate chaſtity to the concluding
" ſcene of her life;

" *And her laſt care was decently to fall* *."

" Celer, likewiſe, a Roman knight, who
" was accuſed of being her gallant, during
" the whole time his ſentence was executing
" upon him, in the ſquare near the ſenate-
" houſe, perſiſted in ſaying, *What crime*
" *have I been guilty of? I have been guilty of*
" *none* †."

If the perſonal ſecurity of theſe unhappy virgins was thus wantonly invaded by the barbarity of the Pagan emperors, the chaſte reputation of the ſiſterhood has been treated with equal cruelty and injuſtice by the out-

* Euripides, in his Tragedy of Hecuba.

† Melmoth's Pliny: the eleventh Letter of the fourth Book.

rageous

rageous zeal of ſome Chriſtian authors. I ſhall not at preſent ſtop to comment on theſe, as I intend, in the ſubſequent part of my work, to ſpeak of many holy writers, whoſe pious labours have been particularly directed to that moſt attractive ſubject, virginity.

It is not ſurpriſing, that ſome of them ſhould, in the heat of their zeal, make very free with the reputation both of the young and old maids among the Pagans. We may forgive the exceſſes of miſtaken piety; but when a critic of modern times — when an author, writing in a country that piques itſelf on delicacy and politeneſs — when a Frenchman, in the courteous age of Lewis the Fourteenth, raſhly attempts to diſhonour all the virgins of the heathen world, I eſteem it my duty, as the voluntary champion of the inſulted ſiſterhood, to expoſe and chaſtiſe this very arrogant and licentious delinquent. The perſon who has been guilty of this high miſdemeanor, is Monſieur Morin; who, in the year 1713, produced, in the French Academy of Belles Lettres, a compoſition

entitled, "A critical Hiſtory of Celibacy." In the cloſe of it, this preſumptuous author not only traduces the poor mortal virgins of antiquity, but attempts to diſhonour even the virgin Goddeſſes themſelves.

That the ſiſterhood may be judges of his offence againſt them, I ſhall tranſlate ſome paſſages of the treatiſe, in which their purity is ſo grievouſly inſulted. I ſhall begin with the inſtances he produces, of that high eſteem for chaſtity, which the heathens profeſſed.

"Virginity paſſed amongſt them for "ſomething divine and ſacred. The "Greeks called thoſe who profeſſed it "Ηιθεους, *Demigods*, or equal to Gods; and "the Latin etymologiſts derive the word "*cœlebs* from *cœlum*—cœlebs quaſi cœleſ-"tis—implying, that thoſe who live in ce-"libacy are celeſtial beings. They re-"garded this virtue as a ſupernatural "grace,

"*Et pluſquam fœminâ virgo!*

"*Virgin! a title higher far than wife!*

" It was a univerſal principle of Paganiſm, " that the Gods were pleaſed with chaſtity :

" *Caſta placent Superis.*

" Their ſacrifices were not thought com- " pleat, without the aſſiſtance of a virgin. " They might, indeed, begin them with- " out this neceſſary miniſter, or make the " libation (*libare*) ; but they could not " complete the ceremony, which was ex- " preſſed by the Latin word *litare.* They " were perſuaded, that this virtue is what " advances us neareſt to Divinity.

" They ſaid, that as God is alone ſuffi- " cient to himſelf, and finds in his own " eſſence all that is neceſſary to him for " ſovereign beatitude, ſo alſo virgins, in- " ſtead of fooliſhly ſeeking their happineſs " in the poſſeſſion of other creatures, find " it without wandering from themſelves, in " their purity, in their innocence, in their " integrity *.

* Plotinus, lib. v. cap. 1.

" Let

" Let us hear a Platonician* unfold
" the ſentiments of his ſect on this ſyſtem
" of life: — ' It reflects honour on a
" maiden to preſerve with ſolicitude the
" purity of her body and of her ſoul.
" This condition gives her a great ſupe-
" riority over all perſons of her own ſex.
" Diſengaged from the cares of the world,
" ſhe has the eyes of her mind continually
" fixed upon a ſpiritual life, from whence
" ſhe derives all the delights of true
" wedlock, in filling her heart with ſuch
" divine

* Naumachius.—The French authors are very apt to quote the ancients in ſuch a manner as to perplex, inſtead of informing, their readers. Mr. Morin had only annexed the name Naumachius to this ſingular tranſlation from a Greek author, whom he calls a Platonician. I was for ſome time unable to diſcover this obſcure advocate of virginity; but at length have found, that he is one of the many poets but little known, whoſe fragments are preſerved in the collection of Stobæus. The beſt critics are of opinion, ſays the intelligent Fabricius, that Naumachius was a Chriſtian. Indeed, this appears highly probable from the paſſage in queſtion; which I ſhall here inſert,

" divine words, as enable her to conceive
" and to produce the moſt luminous me-
" ditations.'

" Here, indeed, we have magnificent
" language, ſublime ideas, and ſpecula-
" tions of ſingular beauty; but unluckily,

with a poetical verſion of it, to do all the juſtice in my power to this neglected encomiaſt of Old Maids.

Καλον μεν δεμας αγνον εχειν, αδμητα τε μιμνειν
Παρθενικην καθαροισι τ' αιει μελεδημασι χαιρειν,
Μητε βαρυτλητων λαγονων περι φορτον αγεσαν,
Μητε πονον τρομεεσαν αγαστονον ειλειθυιης,
Αλλ' ησθαι βασιλειαν αφαυρων θηλυτεραων,
Ψυχης ομμα φαεινον υπερ βιοτοιο χεεσαν
Ενθα γαμοι κεδνοι και αληθεες ενθα μιγεισα
Θεσπεσιοις επεεσσι νοηματα φαεα τικτει.

Stobæus, p. 420. edit. 1609.

'Tis lovely, as a ſpotleſs maid to live,
Bleſt in that joy which pure ideas give,
Free from that load the pregnant form ſuſtains,
Nor trembling at Lucina's fearful pains;
But o'er frail females rais'd in triumph high,
Darting o'er life the mind's unclouded eye:
True wedlock thus in heavenly terms is taught,
And the rapt virgin teems with radiant thought.

" when

" when compared with practice and reality,
" we ſhall find them empty words, and no-
" thing more. Theſe fine declaimers were
" not deſtitute of light; but, as they knew
" God, and did not honour him as God, we
" may alſo ſay, that if they perceived the
" excellence of virgin purity, they ſuc-
" ceeded no better in the obſervation of
" its laws. Whoever is diſpoſed to ſearch
" into the ſecret hiſtory of ſuch perſons
" among them, as lived in celibacy, and
" affected the moſt ſcrupulous continence,
" may diſcover, if not groſs debauchery, at
" leaſt many abſurdities, and an abſolute
" farce. To begin with their Goddeſſes:
" —Veſta, the moſt ancient of all, was ſhe
" not repreſented in her temple with an in-
" fant in her arms? Whence had ſhe taken
" it?—Minerva had her Erichthonius, who
" was almoſt continually at her ſide. Her
" adventure with Vulcan is well known,
" and enables us to declare, that if ſhe
" could on any ground pretend to the cha-
" racter of a virgin, ſhe certainly had no
" claim to the title of *Intacta*, her com-

" mon appellation. She had even ſome
" temples conſecrated to her honour in the
" character of a mother.—Diana had alſo
" her gallant Verbius, or Hippolytus, and,
" ſtill worſe, her Endymion. The only
" pleaſure ſhe took, in indulging her eyes
" with the contemplation of his ſleeping
" form, tells us enough, and, indeed, too
" much for a virgin.—The Muſes, in their
" time, paſſed for very liberal coquettes.
" Myrtilus, who is quoted by Arnobius,
" boldly affirmed, that they were the in-
" dulgent intimates of a certain Megaleon,
" who had a taſte for muſic and poetry:
" he even aſſigns children to all of them,
" and mentions all their ſeveral names.
" —Their Veſtals, whoſe chaſtity they ſo
" highly extolled, were only obliged to re-
" main ſingle to the age of thirty, when
" they were reſtored to all their natural
" rights: they did not fail to exerciſe theſe
" rights before that period; and we muſt
" not believe that the Romans buried
" alive all the Veſtals, who indulged them-

" ſelves

" ſelves in that liberty; no, only thoſe in-
" diſcreet virgins, who had not learned the
" ſecret art of conducting themſelves ac-
" cording to that uſeful maxim, Si non
" caſte, ſaltem caute—if not with chaſtity,
" at leaſt with caution *."

Such are the unwarrantable liberties which Monſieur Morin has taken with Pagan virginity. — In anſwer to the attack which this petulant Frenchman has made on all the Old Maids of antiquity, both mortal and divine, I ſhall only obſerve, that the inference he draws from the Pagan ſentiments he produces, is diametrically oppoſite to what it ought to be, not only according to the rules of delicacy and candour, but according to the laws of ſound reaſoning. Having ſhewn us very copiouſly, and very fairly, that the heathen ladies ſet the higheſt value on virginity, he ought undoubtedly to have ſaid, that although the perſonal hiſtory of ſome ancient

* Memoires de l'Academie, &c. tome quatrieme, p. 308.

nymphs and goddeſſes might induce us to believe that incontinence was prevalent in the days of Heatheniſm, yet, when we conſider the forcible and graceful terms, in which ſome of theſe frail nymphs lament their own weakneſs, we ought certainly to conclude, that many honeſt virgins, though their names have not reached us, exiſted in the Pagan world, and maintained, in the midſt of its tempting licentiouſneſs, a very happy and honourable agreement between their principles and their practice.

Some of the Pagan Goddeſſes ſhould undoubtedly have been excepted from this general cenſure; three in particular, whoſe virginity (though it will not, I fear, reflect much honour on the ſiſterhood) was ſo unqueſtionable as to become a kind of proverb; I mean the Furies, whoſe maiden purity is aſſerted in a ſtriking fragment of Sophocles *,

* Αει παρθενοι Ερινυες.

Sophocles apud Suidam.

It

It may perhaps extenuate the offence of Monſieur Morin againſt the ſiſterhood, to remark, that he was led into this wanton cruelty towards the virgins of Paganiſm, by his deſire of paying an oblique compliment to thoſe more numerous Old Maids, the Roman Catholic Nuns; of whom I ſhall ſpeak at large in the ſubſequent part of this work. At preſent, I have a few more obſervations to make on the ladies of ancient Rome.—Theſe ladies may be ſaid, like the heroes of their country, to have reached the extremes both of virtue and of vice. There are two anecdotes in the Roman Hiſtory, which particularly diſcover the variation of female manners: the firſt is beautifully recorded by Livy, in a few words; which muſt loſe, I fear, a great part of their graceful energy by the following tranſlation.

" The Patrician matrons had expelled " from their religious aſſembly Virginia, " the daughter of Aulus, for violating the " dignity of their order by her marriage " with Volumnius, the Plebeian conſul. A " ſhort altercation, ariſing from female " reſentment,

" reſentment, blazed forth in a gene-
" ral conteſt of indignant ſpirits; when
" Virginia juſtly boaſted, that ſhe had en-
" tered the temple of Patrician Modeſty, in
" the character of a modeſt Patrician, the
" wife only of one man, to whom ſhe
" was led a virgin; and that ſhe could
" neither repent of that huſband, nor
" of his honours and exploits. She en-
" hanced, by a very noble deed, the magna-
" nimity of her ſpeech:—ſhe ſet apart a
" ſufficient ſpace in the houſe where ſhe
" reſided for a moderate ſanctuary; ſhe
" placed in it an altar; and, having aſſem-
" bled the Plebeian matrons, and lamented
" to them the injuſtice of the Patricians;
" 'This altar,' ſhe ſaid, 'I dedicate to Ple-
" beian Modeſty; and I exhort you, that, as
" there exiſts among the men of this city
" a rivalſhip in valour, there may be ſuch
" alſo in modeſty among its matrons. Let
" it be your endeavour, that this altar may
" be, if poſſible, more ſanctified than theirs,
" and acquire the reputation of being at-
" tended by chaſter votaries!'"

To

To this pleaſing picture of ſpirited modeſty, we find a ſtriking and melancholy contraſt in the conduct of thoſe Roman ladies, who, in the conſulſhip of Acilius Balbus and Porcius Cato, were ſo extravagantly licentious, that the ſenate thought proper to conſult the Sibylline oracle for ſome method of averting the public evils, ariſing from female depravity: they were directed to ſupplicate the Divinity who preſided over the tender affections; and accordingly built a new temple to Venus, under the title of Verticordia—The Corrector of the Heart.

This extraordinary fact is related by Valerius Maximus, and clearly alluded to in the following verſes of Ovid.

* *Propitiate Venus!—on that heavenly friend*
Your charms, your manners, and your fame depend:

* *Supplicibus verbis illam placate: ſub illa*
Et forma et mores et bona fama manent.
Româ pudicitia proavorum tempore lapſa eſt:
Cumæam, veteres, conſuluiſtis anum;
Templa jubet Veneri fieri: quibus ordine factis,
Inde Venus verſo nomina corde tenet.

Ovid. Faſt. Lib. iv. v. 154.

In

In Rome of old weak Chaſtity decay'd:
Our ſires conſulted the Cumæan Maid:
She cried—To Venus a new temple frame!
Hence the kind Goddeſs holds her moral name.

Ovid ſeems to have been as partial to the fair ſex as any individual of the poetical choir; yet we cannot ſay that his poetry, taken altogether, leads us to think very highly of Roman chaſtity, in the celebrated age of Auguſtus. If the ſtate of manners could be fairly eſtimated from the ſuſpicious teſtimony of a ſatirical poet, we might ſuppoſe the condition of this tender virtue ſtill more deplorable in the ſucceeding reigns; and we might abſolutely deſpair of finding a ſingle Roman Old Maid after the days of Juvenal. This outrageous declaimer, in that moſt groſs and virulent libel againſt the fair ſex, his ſixth Satire, conſiders the man as perfectly inſane, who expects to meet with a chaſte woman in Rome. But ſuch indelicate ſarcaſms are diſgraceful only to their author; and I doubt not but many good wives, and virgins (for ſuch ſurely exiſted,

iſted, even in the days of Juvenal) deſpiſed the groſs invective of this frantic moraliſt, as much as thoſe of modern times have deſpiſed the leſs indecent ſarcaſm of Pope, that

"*Every woman is at heart a rake.*"

It is very remarkable, that the three ſatiriſts, who have written againſt the lovely part of the creation with the moſt acrimonious hoſtility, were three old batchelors: at leaſt we have never heard that Juvenal had a wife; and of Boileau and Pope we know, not only that they were never married, but in all probability never flattered by the endearments of any amiable woman. I have made this remark, becauſe it will naturally lead me to what reflects the higheſt honour on the ſiſterhood—a compariſon between old batchelors and Old Maids in an important point, which very forcibly expreſſes the different characters of each community.

We find that theſe three poetical and moral

moral old batchelors, in thoſe raging fits of ſour ſpleen, which they falſely ſuppoſed the enthuſiaſim of genuine virtue, calumniated woman, though a gentle being, from whom they had received no injury, and with whom they could never form a perfect acquaintance. Now obſerve the contraſt; among all the Old Maids who have written either verſe or proſe—and their number is infinite — I never heard of one, who had vented her ill-humour in ſuch bitter and contemptuous invectives againſt the ſtronger and more injurious ſex. No; the ancient virgin has that natural tenderneſs and generoſity of heart, that, whatever her ignorance of man may be, whatever ground ſhe may have to complain of his neglect, ſhe ſtill conſiders him, to uſe the words of Shakeſpeare, as the paragon of animals. The exceſs of virtue has been known, in many male moraliſts, to degenerate into a ſullen and prepoſterous contempt and hatred towards the whole human race; but, for the honour of the fair ſex in general, and

of

of my candid friends the Old Maids in particular, I beg it may be for ever remembered, that they are perfectly free from that moſt diſguſting and moſt wretched of all mental infirmities, miſanthropy.

But to return to the main ſubject of my preſent chapter, the Old Maids of ancient Rome.—I cannot indeed exhibit ſuch a liſt of theſe ladies as I could wiſh; but the deficiency, without doubt, ariſes not from the rarity of the character, but from the inexcuſable inaccuracy, which I have before lamented in the ancient hiſtorians and biographers, who have failed to commemorate the merits of the ſiſterhood. I am happy, however, in being able to conclude, and to embelliſh this chapter with the name of one illuſtrious Old Maid, who may be regarded as a peculiar favourite of Minerva, ſince ſhe was not only eminent for her chaſtity, but excelled in one of the moſt elegant among the arts. I mean the celebrated Lala, who, though not a native of Rome, exerciſed the profeſſion of painting in that city,

during

during the youth of Marcus Varro. He probably gave a full deſcription of this amiable perſon, in one of thoſe 490 volumes, which he is ſaid to have written. Though the works of this moſt learned Roman have unfortunately periſhed, the name and merits of Lala have happily ſurvived. We are told, that ſhe painted with great rapidity; that ſhe excelled in the portraits of women; and that her pictures bore a price ſuperior to what was given to the moſt ſkilful painters of her time. Her claim to honourable diſtinction in this volume, is grounded on the unqueſtionable evidence of that profound naturaliſt, antiquarian, and connoiſſeur, the elder Pliny; who certainly could not be deceived in ſuch a point of natural hiſtory; and who aſſerts, in the moſt poſitive language, that Lala was a perpetual virgin.

With this lady I muſt cloſe my very imperfect account of the Pagan virgins; and, when I reflect how many good but unknown Old Maids exiſted before the chaſte

Lala, I cannot help breathing a ſigh of regret, ſimilar to that which Horace expreſſes in reflecting on the many brave, but uncelebrated warriors who lived before Agamemnon;

Chaſte was their fame, yet now in darkneſs drown'd,
Their hapleſs virtue no kind herald found.

But let us haſten to conſole ourſelves with a view of the more fortunate ancient virgins of the Chriſtian ſiſterhood; theſe, inſtead of wanting an encomiaſt, have perhaps been ſometimes extolled in too laviſh panegyrics: as this, however, is a queſtion of great delicacy, we will proceed to a candid and ample diſcuſſion of it, in our ſubſequent chapters.—I ſhall begin with conſidering the infinite increaſe of Old Maids after the eſtabliſhment of the Chriſtian æra.

END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

BOOK IV.

ON OLD MAIDS, AFTER THE CHRISTIAN ÆRA.

CHAP. I.

On the infinite Increaſe of Old Maids after the Chriſtian Æra.

I Am now arrived at the moſt hazardous part of this important Eſſay; and I feel that the future conduct of it muſt be attended with many difficulties. To do full juſtice to my maiden ſubject, I hold it neceſſary to dwell on ſeveral of thoſe ancient fathers of the church, who conſidered virginity as the darling object of their pious lucubrations: but, as I wiſh to render theſe volumes attractive to every claſs of readers, let me here declare, that I ſhall zealouſly endeavour

endeavour to ſpeak of all the ſaints, who have touched on this intereſting topic before me, in ſuch a manner, that I may hope not to tire the volatile, or offend the pious.

By the pious, I mean only the good people of our reformed religion, being aware that I muſt expect little or no mercy from a Catholic reader; for although I declare myſelf the friend and champion of the honeſt Proteſtant Old Maid, I am very far from being an advocate for monaſtic virginity. Indeed, it is with pity and indignation, that I conſider how many thouſand of the moſt lovely females have been immured, to languiſh in a cloiſter, by parental tyranny; or have been led, by the inſinuating arts of ſuperſtition, to enter on a voluntary ſecluſion from all the moſt amiable duties and delights of human life. Though I am willing to believe, that ſincere purity has often reſided in a convent, I cannot but conſider the Proteſtant Old Maid, who ſupports with chearful content a virginity, which is the conſequence rather of accident and neceſ-

ſity, than of choice, as a more exemplary and intereſting perſonage than the Romiſh nun, who, in her zeal for chaſtity, renounces mankind for ever. I am convinced, that the former character, neglected and depreciated as it may have been, is more truly conſonant to the genuine ſpirit of Chriſtianity, that ſimple and ſublime religion, which is a friend to ſocial happineſs, and an enemy to every ſelfiſh principle.

Since nature, reaſon, and faith may all incline us to co-operate in the preſervation of our ſpecies, it is aſtoniſhing, that any powers could be found ſufficient to counteract their united influence, and to make a number of human beings perſiſt in renouncing the moſt precious privilege of their exiſtence, the privilege of communicating their own enjoyments, both tranſient and eternal, to new beings, more dear to them than their own perſonal advantage. The ſevere pains of child-birth are graciouſly compenſated by ſuch a profuſion of tender delight, that the moſt ſelfiſh timidity could

could not decline the burthen, after thinking on its reward. The more we reflect on the generous energy of the maternal feelings, the more ſhall we be ſurpriſed at the multitudes of women, who, in the firſt ages of Chriſtianity, devoted themſelves to a ſingle life. The whole ſex appears to have been inflamed with a paſſion for virginity; and a reſpectable author, who has lately given us an amuſing hiſtory of women, informs us, that in the fourth century, a ſingle city contained no leſs than twenty thouſand virgins, who had taken a vow of perpetual chaſtity *. Notwithſtanding the extreme humility which they profeſſed, I am afraid there was a ſtrong mixture of ſecret pride in this unreaſonable conduct. All the primitive Chriſtian maidens ſeem to have coveted ſuch a ſepulchral panegyric as the following couplet beſtows on our queen Elizabeth:

* Alexander's Hiſtory of Women, Oct. edit. p. 415, vol. II.—This book would be more valuable, if the ingenious writer had quoted his authorities.

She was and is (what can there more be ſaid?)
On earth the chief, in heaven the ſecond
maid *.

Perhaps the nuns of the ancient church had pretenſions to this ideal ſanctity leſs equivocal than thoſe of our virgin queen. However this may be, it is a curious and intereſting ſpeculation to ſearch into the immediate cauſes of ſuch wonderful facts; and to examine the particular ſource of thoſe ideas, that could ſo forcibly counteract the tender bias of nature in the female character of thoſe times. The ardent zeal with which the early Chriſtians embraced a life of celibacy, may be aſcribed to two cauſes: firſt, to the advice of St. Paul, who ſtrongly diſſuades them from marriage; and ſecondly, to thoſe flaming pieces of eccleſiaſtical eloquence, in which the fathers of the church were pleaſed to magnify virginity, and to pour into the heated imagination of their

* Camden's Remains, p. 524.

female

female diſciples an unquenchable love for this imaginary virtue. As I advance in this Eſſay, I ſhall give a particular account of theſe remarkable orations. In the preſent chapter, I ſhall confine myſelf to conſider the advice of St. Paul, and the immediate conſequences which it ſeems to have produced.

I truſt that I ſhall not be thought to fail in that reſpect, which every ſincere Chriſtian owes to this eloquent and admirable apoſtle, by declaring that I have frequently read his ſtrong exhortation to a life of celibacy with ſurpriſe and concern. His Epiſtle to the Corinthians, in which he affirms, that it is better not to marry, inſtead of making me a convert to his opinion, induces me to exclaim with Milton,

Our Maker bids increaſe; who bids abſtain
But our deſtroyer, foe to God and Man?

It is true indeed that St. Paul is very far from uttering ſuch a prohibition; and in his firſt Epiſtle to Timothy he foretels,

that this prohibitory doctrine ſhall ariſe from ſeducing ſpirits *. In the ſecond chapter of the ſame Epiſtle, he appears to be ſo far from an advocate for celibacy, that he almoſt ſeems to intimate, that women muſt work out their ſalvation by the production of children: — yet his addreſs to the Corinthians is ſo pointed in favour of a ſingle life, his ſarcaſtic expreſſion, "It is better to "marry than to burn," might, to many weak, or prudiſh, or enthuſiaſtic females, exhibit wedlock in ſuch a degrading point of view, that perhaps his ſtrong exhortation to a life of virginity might influence many of his maiden diſciples, more forcibly than an abſolute prohibition of marriage could have done. At all events, when we conſider the extenſive veneration which was juſtly paid to this apoſtle, we may fairly conclude, that the multitude of primitive Old Maids was infinitely increaſed by his Firſt Epiſtle to the Corinthians. As St. Paul expreſsly tells

* 1 Tim. iv. † 1 Tim. ii. 14.

us,

us, in this Epiſtle, that, "concerning virgins, "he had no commandment of the Lord *;" we may queſtion, without a ſhadow of impiety, the utility of his advice.—I confeſs, that at the firſt view, it appeared to my underſtanding not conſiſtent with that benevolent and temperate wiſdom, which certainly adorned the character of St. Paul. But the excellent Mr. Locke, in a note to his Paraphraſe of this Epiſtle, ſuggeſts an idea that may juſtify the apoſtle's diſſuaſion from marriage, not as a general precept, but as a temporary counſel. It is ſuppoſed by our great Chriſtian philoſopher, that St. Paul might ſpeak, in this Epiſtle, "*out of a* "*prophetical foreſight of the approaching per-* "*ſecution under Nero.*" On this ſuppoſition he might diſſuade his diſciples from marriage, not as an enemy to connubial enjoyments, but as fearing they would more ſenſibly feel the miſery of their impending oppreſſion, if they were torn from all the delightful comforts of a married life.

* Chap. vii. ver. 25.

However

However wiſe and well-timed the apoſtle's advice might be, we have reaſon to apprehend, that the extravagant attachment to virginity, which ſome of his female diſciples conceived, was the occaſion of many domeſtic quarrels, and much private diſtreſs. At leaſt we have one memorable example of this effect, if we may give any credit to the marvellous adventures of his follower Thecla, who is celebrated by ſeveral fathers of the church as the firſt and moſt illuſtrious of the virgin martyrs. As the anecdotes of this lady are very remarkable, I ſhall extract a little ſketch of her life from Jacobus Philippus Bergomenſis, who publiſhed, in 1497, a Latin folio *on illuſtrious Women*, addreſſed to Beatrice queen of Bohemia.

"Thecla was a native of Iconium, a city "of Aſia; ſhe was born in an elevated "rank of life, and poſſeſſed, with the advan- "tages of birth, the ſuperior attractions of "beauty. Her mother Theoclia was pre- "paring for the delight of marrying her

" daughter to a noble and comely youth,
" whoſe name was Thamirus, when St.
" Paul arriving in their city, happened to
" lodge in the houſe adjoining to that in
" which Thecla reſided. The virgin was
" ſo faſcinated by the eloquence of the
" apoſtle, that no intreaties could prevail
" on her to quit the window, where ſhe had
" placed herſelf to hear him, and where ſhe
" ſat for three days without taſting any
" food *. Theoclia lamented, to the deſ-
" tined huſband of her daughter, this won-
" derful faſcination. But the lover and the
" parent were equally unſucceſsful in their
" attempts, to divert the maiden from her
" attachment to the preacher. The morti-
" fied Thamirus departed in anger, to en-
" quire into the character and doctrine of
" this new prophet, whoſe diſcourſe had

* In feneſtra itaque domûs ſuæ per triduum quaſi ſui oblita, ad audiendum hominem pellecta, ſine ullo prorſus cibo conſedit, ut inde a nemine amoveri potuerit. Jac. Bergomenſis, page 61.

" produced

" produced ſo marvellous an effect on his
" alienated miſtreſs. Having learned that
" he was a Chriſtian, who, by his exhorta-
" tions, deterred virgins from wedlock, the
" indignant lover gave full ſcope to his re-
" ſentment, and delivered the preacher in
" bonds to the magiſtrate Sextilius, by
" whoſe order he was committed to priſon.
" The devout Thecla, having bribed the
" gaoler, contrived ſtill to feaſt on the elo-
" quence of the impriſoned apoſtle. Being
" detected in her ſecret viſits, ſhe was car-
" ried before the proconſul; where, being
" ſolicited to fulfil her engagement with
" Thamirus, ſhe diſdained to reply. The
" enraged proconſul, ordering the apoſtle to
" be ſcourged, and driven from the city,
" condemned the obſtinate virgin to periſh
" in the flames. But Thecla, being already
" fortified by the inſtructions of Paul, and
" arming herſelf with the ſign of the croſs,
" eſcaped unhurt and triumphant from the
" fire into which ſhe was thrown; and,
" quitting her native city, went to Antioch

" with

" with Paul. The præfect of Antioch be-
" came enamoured of her beauty, and at-
" tempted to violate her chaſtity; but the
" reſolute virgin ſo vigorouſly reſiſted the
" princely raviſher, that ſhe beat his crown
" from his head, tore his mantle aſunder,
" and threw him into a ſtate of idiotiſm, or
" frenzy. She was now accuſed of ſor-
" cery, and condemned to be devoured by
" wild beaſts. She marched, however, un-
" daunted to her puniſhment; and happily
" found in her purity a preſervative againſt
" the fury of bears and lions. The heart
" of the proconſul was ſoftened by her mi-
" raculous preſervation; and ſhe obtained
" her freedom.—After theſe adventures, ſhe
" had a joyful meeting with her preceptor
" Paul at Smyrna; and, having received
" from him every inſtruction that could ren-
" der her innocence more perfect, ſhe retired
" to Seleucia; where, having communicated
" her own virtues to many virgin compa-
" nions, ſhe cloſed a life of ſanctity, il-
" luſtrated by many miracles, in the month

" of

" of October, and in the ſixty-ninth year " of our Lord."

Such is the hiſtory which a reverend encomiaſt of the fair ſex has given of this illuſtrious virgin; and it correſponds with the account of other pious biographers, who have expatiated on the merits of the chaſte Thecla, in their various Lives of the Saints. The enlightened readers of our country will, perhaps, conſider with an equal degree of incredulity the different adventures of this wonderful maiden. It is hardly more probable that St. Paul ſhould inſtigate a young damſel to diſobey her parent, and to violate a nuptial promiſe, than that the hungry and enraged beaſts of the foreſt ſhould be rendered harmleſs and gentle by the influence of virginity. But in whatever light theſe aſſerted facts may appear to the intelligent readers of our age and country, it is certain they were received, during many centuries, with implicit belief and veneration. The extraordinary merits of Thecla were a favourite to-

pic

pic with many holy preachers, and St. Ambroſe in particular deſcants upon them in ſo high a ſtrain, that his diſcourſe muſt have had great effect upon his virgin diſciples. " * Let Thecla," exclaims the holy father, in the ſecond diviſion of his Treatiſe upon Virgins, " let Thecla teach you to " ſuffer martyrdom; who, flying from the " bonds of matrimony, and condemned " by the fury of her betrothed huſband, " changed even the nature of ſavage beaſts, " by inſpiring them with reverence for vir- " ginity. When ſhe was expoſed to be " devoured,

* Thecla doceat immolari, quæ copulam fugiens nuptialem, et ſponſi furore damnata, naturam etiam beſtiarum virginitatis veneratione mutavit. Namque parata ad feras, cum aſpectus quoque declinaret virorum, ac vitalia ipſa ſæpe offerret leoni, fecit ut qui impudicos detulerant oculos, pudicos referrent. Cernere erat lingentem pedes beſtiam, cubitare humi, muto teſtificantem ſono, quod ſacrum virginis corpus violare non poſſet. Ergo adorabat prædam ſuam beſtia; et propriæ oblita naturæ, naturam induerat quam homines amiſerant. Videres, quadam naturæ transfuſione, homines feritate indutos ſævitiam imperare

" devoured, when ſhe ſhrunk from the
" ſight of men, and offered her vitals to
" the lion, ſhe converted the cruel wan-
" tonneſs of the ſpectators into a reſpect
" for modeſty: then might you have ſeen
" a wild beaſt fawning at her feet, and teſ-
" tifying, by a gentle murmur, that he had
" not power to violate the ſacred body of
" a virgin. The ſavage adored his prey,
" and, forgetting his own natural qualities,
" aſſumed that nature which man had
" thrown off. You might ſee, by this in-

rare beſtiæ; beſtiam exoſculantem pedes virginis, docere quid homines facere deberent. Tantum habet virginitas admirationis, ut eam etiam leones mirentur. Non impaſtos cibus flexit, non citatos impetus rapuit, non ſtimulatos ira exaſperavit, non uſus decepit aſſuetos, non feros natura poſſedit; docuerunt religionem, dum adorant martyrem; docuerunt etiam caſtitatem, dum virgini nihil aliud niſi plantas exoſculantur, demerſis in terram oculis, tanquam verecundantibus, *ne mas aliquis vel beſtia* virginem nudam videret. Divi Ambroſii de Virginibus, lib. ii. p. 80.

" terchange

" terchange of nature, man aſſuming fero-
" city, and commanding a beaſt to be
" cruel; and a beaſt inſtructing man in his
" duty, by kiſſing the feet of a virgin. So
" truly admirable is virginity, that even
" lions revere it! The ſight of their prey
" did not allure them, though exaſperated
" by hunger; anger did not provoke
" them, though ſtimulated by the rage of
" the people; their cuſtom of devouring
" criminals did not deceive them; their
" natural qualities ceaſed to operate upon
" them! They taught us religion, by adoring
" the martyr; they taught us even chaſtity,
" by confining their kiſſes to the feet of the
" maiden, declining their eyes to the earth,
" as if aſhamed that any male creature,
" though only a ſavage beaſt, ſhould look
" upon a naked virgin."

When the merits of Thecla were thus celebrated by one of the moſt popular and eloquent of the epiſcopal ſaints, we may reaſonably imagine that female ambition was univerſally awakened: the warm ima-

gination of pious maidens was heated to ſuch a pitch of enthuſiaſm, that a paſſion for the glory of martyrdom extinguiſhed all their natural affections; inſtead of wiſhing to become the mothers of well-educated children, they deſired only the purity and the renown of Thecla, to be adored by lions, and extolled by ſaints. How far the moſt eminent fathers of the church conſpired to inflame and perpetuate this ſupernatural ambition in the tender ſex, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew in ſome ſucceeding chapters, concluding the preſent with a few remarks on the illuſtrious Thecla.—This holy maiden, being celebrated as the familiar friend and diſciple of an apoſtle, was generally conſidered as a model for every well-diſpoſed virgin; and, perhaps, in the very long liſt of female ſaints, it is impoſſible to pitch on any individual, whoſe miraculous adventures had ſo powerful an effect in diffuſing an univerſal ardour for the honours of virginity, and increaſing the multitude of Old Maids. Nor is it in the dark

ages

ages alone that we meet with panegyrics on the immaculate Thecla. In the ſixteenth century, ſhe inſpired a Doctor of the Sorbonne with Poetry. Claude d'Eſpence, who is ſtyled by his biographer the moſt judicious and moderate doctor of his time, compoſed, in Latin verſe, an heroic epiſtle from Thecla to St. Paul *.

* Printed at Paris, 1619, in a folio, containing all the Latin works of D'Eſpence.

CHAP. II.

On ſome of the moſt early Chriſtian Authors, who have written on Virginity—Tertullian—St. Cyprian.—On the Canonical Virgins.

SOME ages elapſed before the Chriſtian virgins were ſettled in regular communities; it was not till the cloſe of the fourth century, that the firſt nunnery was erected, in Verona, by Zeno, the biſhop of that city *. But the Chriſtian writers of a much

* See Moſheim's Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, tranſlated by Maclaine, vol. i. p. 307.—The origin of nunneries is a point involved in conſiderable obſcurity, and has given birth to many pious and dull diſputes. St. Syncletica, of Alexandria, has been celebrated as the mother of Nuns, as St. Antony has been revered as the father of Monks; but the hiſtory of this holy parent of religious Old Maids is not very clearly eſtabliſhed. The curious reader, who wiſhes to conſult the various opinions concerning her, may find them collected

much earlier date abundantly prove, that multitudes of pious maidens had devoted themſelves to a ſingle life, before any convents were raiſed for their reception.

Tertullian, who wrote in the ſecond and third century, compoſed a very curious treatiſe, to perſuade theſe holy virgins to cover their faces with a veil; and one argument that he urges for this practice is ſo ſingular, that I cannot forbear to inſert it:—He tells them, it is highly proper to ſhade a countenance of ſuch dangerous power as to occaſion the fall of angels from heaven (alluding to the text of Geneſis, in which the ſons of God are ſaid to have been connected with the daughters of men); "for "who can preſume," ſays Tertullian, "that "ſuch angels would chuſe to cohabit with "the relics of mortal impurity, and not "rather burn for virginity, that flower,

lected in the preliminary diſſertation to an elaborate work, intitled, Hiſtoire des Ordres Monaſtiques, Religieux & Militaires, printed at Paris, in eight quarto volumes.

"which even excuſes the incontinence of "man *?"

The next eminent Chriſtian writer, who treats expreſsly of virgins, is St. Cyprian; who has addreſſed to them a diſcourſe of admonition on their conduct and apparel. The good biſhop of Carthage declaims againſt ear-rings, paint, and falſe hair, as inventions of the devil, inconſiſtent with that ſimplicity of habit by which virgins ſhould be diſtinguiſhed. He exhorts them to avoid public baths and nuptial feaſts; he felicitates them on their eſcaping the curſe of child-birth; and encourages them to perſevere in their chaſtity, by an aſſurance, that their rank is glorious, and that the purity of a virgin approaches very near to the perſeverance of a martyr †.

* Quis præſumere poteſt, tales angelos maculata jam corpora et humanæ libidinis reliquias deſideraſſe, ut non ad virgines potius exarſerint, quarum flos etiam humanam libidinem excuſat.

Tertull. de Virgin. Veland. p. 222.

† Quarum ad gloriam merces ſecunda eſt, ſit et virtus ad tolerantiam proxima. Sanct. Cyprian. de Habitu Virg. p. 102.

Such

Such is the general tenor of St. Cyprian's addreſs to the pious ſiſterhood; but I cannot collect any light, either from Cyprian or Tertullian, concerning the number of Chriſtian females, who had in their times made a public profeſſion of virginity. There are, however, two circumſtances, which may induce us to believe, that theſe holy maidens amounted, even at this period, to an immenſe multitude.—In the firſt place, a veneration for celibacy was carried to ſuch exceſſes in the ſecond century, that many preachers declaimed againſt marriage as the ſuggeſtion of the devil. This gloomy doctrine is ſaid to have been firſt taught by Saturninus of Antioch. The learned Bingham, in his Chriſtian Antiquities, has enumerated many ſects who were addicted to this, perhaps the moſt abſurd of all ſuperſtitions; which yet prevailed to ſuch a degree, and was ſo forcibly ſupported by Euſtathius, a preacher of the fourth century, that, to uſe the words of Bingham, "many women forſook their

" huſbands, and huſbands their wives, from " the perſuaſion, that no one who lived in a " married ſtate could have any hope in " God."

The prevalence of ſuch an idea had certainly a ſtrong tendency to increaſe the number of thoſe religious maidens, who, ſtill reſiding under the roof of their parents, yet made a public profeſſion of virginity, by enrolling their names in the book or canon of the church, and thence acquired the title of Canonical Virgins.

But there was a ſecond circumſtance, peculiar to this early period, which had, perhaps, an effect equally powerful and extenſive in augmenting this maiden community; I mean a very extraordinary cuſtom, which crept into the primitive church, to the ſcandal of the good, and the entertainment of the licentious, the cuſtom (condemned indeed by ſaints and councils, yet ſometimes avowed and vindicated by its adherents) which permitted the canonical virgins to attach themſelves to a favourite preceptor,

preceptor, and even to ſhare his bed, without ceaſing to make a public profeſſion of their virginity.

This fact is ſo ſingular, that the modern ſceptical reader may incline, perhaps, to queſtion the truth of it. Many witneſſes concur in its ſupport; and, as the conſideration of ſo ſtrange a cuſtom may inſtruct us in the ſtate of ancient manners, I doubt not but the more diſcreet virgins of the preſent age will thank me for exhibiting to their view the very dangerous temerity of their primitive ſiſters.

Among the Epiſtles of St. Cyprian, there is one addreſſed to Pomponius, which ſhews us, in very explicit language, the good biſhop's opinion of theſe reſolute, or rather raſh virgins, who, confeſſing that they ſlept with men, ſtill aſſerted their integrity *. The ſaint very forcibly con-

* Quæ ſe cum viris dormiſſe confeſſæ ſint, aſſeverare ſe integras eſſe. Sanct. Cyp. Epiſt. iv.

demns

demns their conduct; and juſtly obſerves, that, however innocent they may be, no one can long be ſafe, who approaches ſo near to danger. Saint Cyprian proceeds to cenſure the boldneſs of thoſe more determined virgins, who attempted to juſtify their perſeverance in ſo perilous a practice:—"Let "not any one," ſays the wary ſaint, "conſider herſelf as ſufficiently excuſed or defended, by offering her perſon to the teſt "of inſpection, ſince the profeſſional judges "of virginity are frequently deceived *." From theſe ſingular expreſſions, we may conceive how ſtrenuouſly the canonical virgins contended for the maintenance of this tempting, though dangerous cuſtom, which, to uſe the metaphor of Dodwell, "had "taken deep root in the church."—This earned commentator on St. Cyprian has il-

* Nec aliqua putet ſe hac excuſatione defendi, quod inſpici et probari poſſit, an virgo ſit: cum et manus obſtetricum et oculus ſæpè fallatur.

Sanct. Cyp. Epiſt. iv.

luſtrated

luſtrated the cuſtom, that I am now ſpeaking of, in a Latin diſſertation. He affirms it was firſt introduced into the Chriſtian church by Paul of Samoſata, biſhop of Antioch, who was perpetually attended by two of theſe fair and faithful virgin diſciples. The practice became ſo common, that the canonical virgins, who thus cohabited with their paſtors, were diſtinguiſhed by a particular Greek appellation *. Many of the fathers declaimed with great energy againſt this claſs of virgins; and the eloquent St. Chryſoſtom, in particular, has left us an animated diſcourſe on this unorthodox cohabitation, divided into two parts; the firſt addreſſed to females, and the ſecond, to his own ſex. From this diviſion, it ſeems probable, that the more wealthy pious maidens admitted indigent preachers to reſide under their roof; while, on the other hand, the wealthy prieſt afforded a ſimilar refuge to the poor canonical virgin. This friendly

* Συνεισακτοι.

and

and tender intercourſe was often perhaps very innocent; but, as it afforded much room for licentious ſurmiſes againſt the clergy, it was expreſsly prohibited by the council of Nice. The warm and eloquent Chryſoſtom begins his addreſs to theſe inconſiderate virgins with the moſt pathetic lamentation:—"Virginity (ſays the indignant ſaint) the moſt honourable of all conditions, has now incurred the moſt humiliating diſgrace; and it ſuffers, not from its enemies, but from thoſe who ſtill preſume to profeſs themſelves its faithful votaries.—There were a few individuals among the Greeks, who, by the aid of philoſophy, were enabled to triumph over avarice and anger; but the flower of virginity never flouriſhed among them. In this point they have always acknowledged our manifeſt ſuperiority; confeſſing that ſuch purity was above the reach of nature, and did not belong *to our ſpecies* *. It was in this point that all the

* Ουκ ανθρωπινον.

"Gentiles

" Gentiles have marvelled at our perfec-
" tion—but they can admire it no longer;
" and their admiration is turned into
" laughter and deriſion. The devil at-
" tacked us in this band, becauſe he per-
" ceived that our virgins were the moſt ef-
" fulgent phalanx in all the hoſt of Chriſ-
" tians; but he has ſo confounded this
" phalanx, that it *would be better for us in*
" *future to have no virgins at all, if they can*
" *thus be driven to neglect their duty* *. The
" cauſe of all theſe evils is this, that virgin
" purity exiſts only in name, while the eſ-
" ſence of it is ſuppoſed to be confined to
" the body, which is the leaſt part of vir-
" ginity: the more eſſential parts, and
" thoſe which chiefly denote it, are diſ-
" regarded; they have ceaſed to diſtin-
" guiſh themſelves by decency of habit, by
" the ſilence which becomes a virgin, by
" compunction, and other marks of a reli-
" gious ſpirit."

* Ως βελτιον ειναι λοιπον μηδε παρθενους ειναι τας ουτω το πραγμα μετιεναι επιχειρουσας.

Such

Such is the language, in which St. Chryſoſtom begins his exhortation to thoſe profeſſed virgins, who permitted men to dwell under their roof: in the courſe of it, the ſaint grows ſo vehement in his anger, as even to hint at burying the fair offenders alive; but, ſince that privilege is not allowed him, he contents himſelf with indignant lamentation. He mentions one circumſtance, which exhibits, in a moſt ſtriking point of view, the groſs indelicacy of ancient manners:—" Every day," ſays he, " the " midwives are running to the houſes of " virgins, as if haſtening to a labour; yet " not to aſſiſt one in the pangs of child- " birth (though even this indeed has hap- " pened to ſome of them) but that they " may be examined, like young female " ſlaves, when they are purchaſed, to diſ- " cover which has been violated and which " is pure. One has readily acquieſced in " this probation—another has refuſed it; " and by this refuſal is reduced to ſhame, " even if ſhe is ſtill uncorrupted. One has

" ſuffered,

" ſuffered, another has not ſuffered; yet " the latter is put to ſhame not leſs than the " former, as being unable to obtain credit " for her purity, and wanting the evidence " of ſuch an inquiſition."

What a diſguſting idea of the fourth century (the age of Chryſoſtom) does this anecdote preſent to us!—I have tranſlated this ſingular paſſage from the ſaint very faithfully, for my maiden readers, at the extreme hazard of offending their delicacy—I have ventured to incur this painful hazard, in the hope of thus guarding them againſt an infirmity, which is ſometimes objected to Old Maids; I mean the infirmity of railing againſt their own time, and preferring paſt ages to the preſent. The good ſpinſter, who juſtly conſiders the point of view in which St. Chryſoſtom exhibits the virgins of his century, will bleſs her ſtars that ſhe was born in our happier days, when the dignity of the virgin character is ſupported with more eaſe and grace, and when the calumniated maiden can gain

credit for her innocence, without being reduced to ſuch a ſhameful teſt of her integrity. The ſevere St. Chryſoſtom would not allow the opulent virgin to retain even a male ſervant under her roof. He laughs at thoſe who made the infirmity of their health a plea for this indulgence; and he draws a very ludicrous picture of thoſe nocturnal occurrences, which his warm imagination ſuggeſted to him as ariſing in the houſes, where the virgin miſtreſs was attended by a male domeſtic. Having endeavoured to prove, that women only ought to wait upon women, he cloſes his addreſs to his female diſciples, by diſplaying, in the moſt magnificent imagery, thoſe high honours, to which immaculate virgins are entitled.

" Remember," ſays the eloquent enthuſiaſt, " in what quarter of the battle you are " ſtationed—it is yours to ſtand and com- " bat round the leader of the conflict, " round the perſon of the king himſelf.— " As in every war the whole army cannot

" occupy

" occupy the ſame ground, but ſome are
" poſted in the wings, ſome in the cen-
" tre, ſome in the rear, and ſome in the
" front of the array; while others, wher-
" ever the king appears, appear alſo, and
" co-operate on every ſide with him; thus
" to the choſen band of virgins is this poſt
" of honour allotted:—nor is it more the
" office of thoſe attendants who are decked
" with habiliments of gold, who ride on
" horſes adorned with golden trappings,
" who carry the golden armour and the re-
" gal gems, to denote the preſence of their
" king, than it is the office of a virgin to
" ſhew the preſence of her lord: theſe at-
" tendants, indeed, appear round the regal
" chariot of their ſovereign; but the virgin
" may, if ſhe is willing, be like the cheru-
" bim, and herſelf become the chariot of
" her king."

Such are the dazzling and extravagant flights of ſaintly eloquence, by which the females of the primitive church were allured to a life of celibacy. Nature very

wiſely made the mutual attraction of the two ſexes ſo very ſtrong, that the moſt vehement efforts of ſuperſtition often failed in attempting to keep them aſunder, though the moſt brilliant and ſeducing rhetorick was aſſiduouſly employed for this purpoſe.

Saint Chryſoſtom, in the ſecond part of his diſcourſe, where he addreſſes himſelf to the prieſts who kept canonical virgins under their roof, very candidly acknowledges, that it is pleaſant to reſide with women, excluſive of any matrimonial or licentious enjoyment; but he endeavours to convince the clergy, who indulged themſelves in this temperate pleaſure, and aſſerted its innocence, that their condition was little better than that of Tantalus. He enumerates the many evils that may ariſe to man from reſiding with a female, even without a violation of their mutual chaſtity; and he compares a prieſt, who has enervated his mind by ſuch a gratification, to a poor lion, whoſe mane has been cut off, whoſe teeth and talons have been

been taken from him, and who is metamorphoſed from the tremendous lord of the foreſt into a wretched animal weak and ridiculous.

Vigilant and ſolicitous as the fathers were to prevent this domeſtic connection between the prieſts and virgins, there were many obſtinate offenders, who reſiſted and deſpiſed their public exhortations, and their private advice. The authority of the great St. Baſil himſelf was not ſufficient to prevail on an aged prieſt, whoſe name was Paregorius, to diſmiſs a canonical virgin reſiding in his houſe: it appears, from a letter ſtill extant, addreſſed by St. Baſil to this old delinquent, that he pleaded the age of ſeventy as his excuſe, and reſolutely oppoſed the ſeverity of his malicious ſuperior, who had attempted to rob his declining life of ſo innocent a comfort. St. Baſil, however, is very far from admitting this apology; and cloſes his letter with a vehement threat of excommunication, if the aged Paregorius ſtill

fondly perſiſted in his attachment to his fair attendant.

Love and religion are often found together; and are never, perhaps, ſo warm and vehement, as when they are united. The prieſt, who attached himſelf to a canonical virgin, with the endearing appellation of ſiſter, was gradually, and perhaps inſenſibly, led to the higheſt pitch of diſintereſted paſſion. The writings of Athanaſius have incidentally preſerved to us a very memorable example of the ſtrange exceſſes that may ariſe from this ardent affection: —The archbiſhop of Alexandria, declaiming againſt the wickedneſs and impudence of his antagoniſts the Arians, in his firſt apology, aſſerts that, inſtead of being aſhamed of the crimes imputed to them, they perſevered, without a bluſh, in their offences. "Leontius," continues the primate, "being cenſured on account of a young "woman called Euſtolia, and forbid to "cohabit with her, *ſacrificed his manhood*

"*for*

"*for her ſake* *, that he might continue to "dwell with her in ſecurity." In his epiſtle to the Monks, Athanaſius ſpeaks again of this diſintereſted lover; and he there expreſsly affirms, that "Leontius had "made this voluntary ſacrifice of himſelf "for the liberty of ſleeping with Euſtolia, "his wife, according to his own account," (ſays the angry Saint) "though ſtill called "a virgin." — The good-natured reader, who will conſider the generous frailty of Leontius with leſs ſeverity than Athanaſius did, may rejoice, perhaps, to be informed, that the loſs of manhood did not prevent this affectionate enthuſiaſt from riſing to a mitre. The ſame auſtere ſaint, who has indignantly recorded his marvellous and unorthodox attachment to his Euſtolia, has told us, with equal indignation, that he was made a biſhop.

Of all the tender martyrs of love, Leontius has, perhaps, the ſtrongeſt title to our

* Δι αυτην εαυτον απεικοψεν.

compaſſionate admiration; and I am induced to recommend his hiſtory to our poets, from a perſuaſion that, in the hands of ſome impaſſioned genius, his Euſtolia might form a pleaſing companion, and a potent rival, to the pathetic and enchanting Eloiſe of Pope.—Before I cloſe this ſhort account of the prohibited domeſtic connection between prieſts and profeſſed virgins, it may be proper to obſerve, that Dodwell ſuppoſes this cuſtom to have deſcended to the primitive clergy from the moſt illuſtrious of the Pagan ſages *. This learned critic imagines, that many an honeſt heathen Old Maid attached herſelf to ſome eminent philoſopher of her time, and was contented with his doctrine, without aſpiring to his careſſes: he mentions the intimacy of Cicero and Cerellia as a caſe in

* Erant enim apud Ethnicos etiam fœminæ, quæ philoſophiæ prætextu virorum familiaritati, aſſuefcerent.—Inde συνεισακτων eccleſiaſticorum profluxerit exemplum a viris etiam magnis philoſophiciſque commendatum. Diſſ. Cyp. iii.

point. That ſuch an innocent but dangerous attachment has exiſted, even in modern days, we have a memorable and a mournful inſtance in the hiſtory of Swift and Stella. That ſingular genius had the talent and the inclination to ſport very cruelly with the paſſions of women; but, as his ingenious and more manly godſon and biographer very candidly confeſſes, without the power to indulge them*. This ingenuous confeſſion is, perhaps, the beſt of all poſſible apologies for the miſanthropical ſpirit imputed to Swift; for they muſt be imperfect and uncandid judges of human infirmities, who do not expect to find, and who cannot readily pardon, a large portion of miſanthropy in a great but unhappy character, immaturely deprived, or never perhaps poſſeſſed, of ſo common yet ſo invaluable a faculty.—But peace to the aſhes of this admirable writer! and peace to thoſe of that fairer object of our compaſſion, his un-

* See Mr. Sheridan's Life of Swift.

fortunate Stella, who had the ſtrange miſfortune of uniting thoſe diſcordant titles, Wife, and Old Maid! May her ſevere and unmerited fate be an eternal leſſon to every ſenſible and warm-hearted ſpinſter, not to contemplate with too tender an admiration, either the wiſdom or the wit of any cold philoſopher!

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

On Methodius, Biſhop of Olympus, and his Banquet of Virgins.

A SPIRIT of pious gallantry ſo inflamed the firſt writers of the church, that their pens were inceſſantly employed in the praiſe of conſecrated virgins. Among the early epiſcopal champions of the ſiſterhood, Methodius was particularly diſtinguiſhed by the purity of his zeal, and the Platonic form of his compoſition. We have but few perſonal circumſtances tranſmitted to us concerning this elegant encomiaſt of virginity; who being firſt biſhop of Olympus, and afterwards of Tyre, cloſed his ſcene of religious glory by acquiring the palm of martyrdom in the perſecution of Diocleſian. Of the many writings which he is ſaid to have left, one alone has eſcaped the ravages of time, and this, although its title

title was ſufficient to awaken curioſity and regard, did not find an editor till about the middle of the laſt century: it is entitled, "The Banquet of Virgins," and bears an evident reſemblance to the celebrated Banquet of Plato. Love had formed the great theme of panegyric in the dialogue of the Pagan philoſopher, and virginity is treated in a ſimilar manner in the chaſter compoſition of the Chriſtian biſhop. I truſt, that my fair readers will eagerly receive an account of this curious performance, and the more ſo, if I firſt relate to them an anecdote from which it will appear, that the Banquet of Virgins, even before its publication, attracted the attention of a queen, a famous and learned queen, who had the ambition, like our Elizabeth, to rank herſelf in the order of Old Maids, though on a very dubious and diſputed title.

In the Paris edition of Methodius by Pierre Pouſſines, a French Jeſuit, who reſided at Rome, there is a letter from the editor to his friend Henri de Valois, which gives

gives an amuſing account of a literary morning, that he paſſed in the Vatican library with ſeveral men of letters, and their royal patroneſs Chriſtina of Sweden. Among the curious volumes that Holſten, the librarian, preſented to the company, there was a copy of Methodius: on the ſight of it, the queen of Sweden ſaid immediately to Pouſſines, "Here is the book "that we eagerly expect from you," alluding to his tranſlation of the Greek text, which he had juſt completed, at the requeſt of his friend the librarian. Before the Jeſuit could reply to this flattering compliment, a man of diſtinguiſhed learning, he tells us, interpoſed in this mortifying manner: "From me, moſt illuſtrious "queen, is the Banquet of Methodius to "be expected; I have occupied this "ground, nor ſhall I yield it to any one." —"I was ſtruck dumb," ſays the unlucky Jeſuit; "I confeſs; for how could I op-"poſe a perſon, my ſuperior in age, con-"nected with me in friendſhip, a favourite

"at

"at Rome, and honoured, indeed, in all "countries for his ſingular merit. While "I was inwardly lamenting my own fruit-"leſs labour," continues Pouſſines, "the "queen took me aſide, and ſaid, "What "can we do in this buſineſs? have you "no expedient to propoſe?" — "None," replied the modeſt though mortified Jeſuit, "but to withdraw, as becomes my time of "life and my profeſſion."

With the letter thus relating his diſappointment, and dated in 1656, Pouſſines ſent a copy of his Methodius to his learned friend at Paris, and in the following year it was handſomely printed in folio, at the royal preſs of that city. Though Pouſſines does not mention the name of his ſucceſsful rival on this occaſion, yet we know, from the octavo edition of Methodius, publiſhed at Rome in the preceding year by the celebrated Leo Allatius, that he was the learned perſon alluded to in the letter of the Jeſuit. —But let us turn from the Editors to the work itſelf.

The

The Banquet of Methodius contains a ſeries of orations, pronounced by eleven virgins, in honour of virginity. To the eloquence of theſe fair and chaſte orators we are introduced by a converſation, between Gregorium, a female attendant of the virgins, and Eubulius, ſuppoſed to be a borrowed name for the pious author of the dialogue.

"EUBULIUS.

"You are come very ſeaſonably, Gre-
"gorium; for I was lately in queſt of you,
"from a deſire to learn ſome particu-
"lars concerning the aſſembly of Marcella,
"Theopatra, and the other virgins col-
"lected at the banquet, and chiefly con-
"cerning their diſcourſes on chaſtity; for
"it is ſaid, they contended on that topic
"with ſuch ſpirit and energy, that they
"omitted nothing which could illuſtrate
"their ſubject: if, therefore, you are come
"on any other buſineſs, wave it at preſent,
"and do not heſitate to give me the cir-
"cumſtantial narrative I requeſt of you.

"GREGORIUM.

" GREGORIUM.

" I will attempt it.—But firſt anſwer me, " Do you know Arete, the daughter of " Philoſophy?

" EUBULIUS.

" Aſſuredly.

" GREGORIUM.

" Being invited into her garden, I mean " that towards the eaſt, we proceeded to " feaſts on the fruits in ſeaſon; 'And I (ſaid " Theopatra to me, for I collected all the " particulars from her *) I, and Procilla, " and Tyſiana, walked over a very rough, " difficult, and arduous road; but when " we approached,' continued Theopatra, " 'to the ſpot, a majeſtic and comely wo- " man, advancing with gentle grace, and " clad in a garment of ſnowy ſplendor, " received us. She was, in truth, all celeſ-

* This in an awkward parentheſis; it would have been better if Gregorium had begun by ſaying, ſhe ſpoke only in the character of Theopatra, and was not herſelf preſent at the banquet.

" tial,

"tial, inimitable beauty; a modeſt ſanc-
"tity adorned her countenance; her look
"expreſſed both auſterity and mildneſs,
"united in ſuch a pleaſing manner, as I
"never ſaw before; in all points ſhe ap-
"peared negligent of her charms, and wore
"no foreign ornament. This perſonage,
"advancing with much joy, careſſed each
"of us with the endearments of a long ab-
"ſent mother: 'O my daughters,' ſhe
"exclaimed, 'you have with difficulty
"reached me, eager to conduct you into
"the field of perfection, after a journey in
"which you have been alarmed by a va-
"riety of reptiles; for I ſurveyed you
"from this eminence, often ſtaggered in
"your approach, and I was afraid leſt ye
"might periſh by a fall from the preci-
"pice; but thanks to that bridegroom, to
"whom I have united you, my children,
"and who has accompliſhed all things ac-
"cording to our prayers.' Having ſaid
"this, 'Let us advance,' ſhe cried, 'within

"the

" the boundary, as the gates are yet open.'
" On our entrance, we found Thecla,
" Agatha, and Marcella, prepared for the
" banquet. She told me, that Arete im-
" mediately ſaid, 'You alſo take your
" places here by theſe your companions;
" for we now happily amounted to the
" number ten. The ſcene was ſuperna-
" tural in beauty, and full of perfect tran-
" quillity; the air which pervaded it was
" blended with the pureſt light, and was of
" the ſofteſt temperature. In the centre, a
" ſtream as ſmooth as oil afforded the
" ſweeteſt beverage; its water, limpid and
" pure, formed itſelf into fountains, which,
" ſpreading like a river, ſupplied all the
" garden with many copious rills. The
" trees were of various kinds, and rich in
" their recent burthens. Great was the
" beauty of their fruit, that *hung amiable* *.
" The ground was decorated with never-

* The Greek expreſſion here has a ſingular reſemblance to the words of Milton, καρπων απεωρουμενων ιλαρως.

" fading

" fading and variegated flowers, that dif-
" fuſed the ſweeteſt fragrance. Near us
" was a lofty agnus caſtus *, under which we
" reſted, becauſe it was extenſive and ſhady.

" EUBULIUS.

" Happy woman! you appear to me to
" be deſcribing a ſecond Paradiſe.

" GREGORIUM.

" Your remark is juſt.—As ſoon, there-
" fore, as we had partaken of every dainty
" refreſhment and various recreation, ſo
" that no delight was wanting, ſhe ſaid
" that Arete thus introduced the ſubject:
" —'O my young damſels, the boaſt and
" pride of my aſpiring ſpirit! O ye lovely
" maidens, who cultivate the unploughed
" fields of Chriſt with your virgin hands †,
" enough of food and feaſting, for with us
" all things are in perfect plenty. What
" therefore remains for me to wiſh or to

* A tree ſo called, and ſacred to chaſtity.

† Ω καλλιπαρθενοι τες ανηροτους Χριστε γεωργουσαι λειμωνας ανυμφευτοις χερσι. Methodii, p. 5. edit. Par.

" require? That each of you would favour
" me with a ſpeech upon virginity. Let
" Marcella begin, ſince ſhe is firſt in place,
" and alſo the ſenior; and when ſhe has
" well exerciſed her talents, I will take
" ſhame to myſelf if I do not render her an
" object of envy, by fixing on her brow the
" ſpotleſs foliage of wiſdom.' On this, * ſhe
" ſaid, Marcella immediately began."

As I fear the majority of modern readers would not reliſh the pious prolixity of theſe rhetorical virgins, I omit even a little ſummary of their reſpective orations.

Arete cloſes the converſation, by remarking, that purity of mind and body are equally eſſential to conſtitute the perfect virgin. She proceeds to commend and to crown the ten maiden orators; and the entertainment concludes with religious ſinging, Thecla taking the principal part, and the reſt of the aſſembly joining in the fol-

* Theopatra, in whoſe words Gregorium deſcribes the ſcene.

lowing

lowing chorus, which is frequently repeated:

" For thee I am chaſte; and, poſſeſſing " a reſplendent lamp, O bridegroom, I riſe " to meet thee."

Upon Gregorium's finiſhing her account of the banquet, Eubulius ſtarts this curious and delicate queſtion: " Which are the " better virgins, they who are chaſte from " a quiet purity of conſtitution, or they " who in practiſing this virtue are obliged " to ſtruggle with deſire?"

Gregorium haſtily decides in favour of the firſt; but Eubulius arguing the point with her, much in the manner of Plato, at laſt convinces her, by alluſions to the phyſician who ſubdues a fever, and to the pilot who paſſes through a ſtorm, that the palm of honour is certainly due to thoſe maidens who have laboured through a fiery trial, and ſucceſsfully contended with an imperious paſſion.

Such is the Banquet of Methodius; which, though certainly the production of a pious

and elegant mind, is ſo little adapted to modern taſte and manners, that I dared not venture on a more ample deſcription of it. The preceding abridgment may, I think, be amuſing to many readers, as it will render them acquainted with a ſingular compoſition but little known, and as it forcibly ſhews, that, among the early paſtors of the church, one of the favourite points that piety and learning purſued, was to increaſe the multitude of Old Maids.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

On St. Athanaſius, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

AS many moſt eminent fathers of the church appear to have contended for the palm of eloquence on this tempting ground, and ſucceſſively exerted all their powers of perſuaſion in magnifying the merits of virginity, I intend to give a little ſketch of their reſpective compoſitions, in chronological order.—The next holy encomiaſt, who ſeems to have honoured the canonical virgins with an expreſs panegyric, is the celebrated Athanaſius, who became biſhop of Alexandria in the year 326. Though we find, in the printed works of this illuſtrious ſaint, a little treatiſe in praiſe of virginity, it is proper to remark, that the moſt judicious of the Catholic critics will not allow this to be the genuine production

of Anthanaſius. It conſiſts of good advice to the pious virgin on the articles of dreſs and prayer.

In ſpeaking of holy meditation, Athanaſius, or whoever the author may be, has a paſſage that ſtrikes me as ſublime: "Remember," ſays he, "the twelfth hour; "for in that our Saviour deſcended into "hell; hell ſhuddered in beholding him, "and cried aloud, Who is he that cometh "with great power? who is he that tramples on the brazen portals of hell, and "unbindeth the chain of my captives?"

In the cloſe of this treatiſe, after delivering many precepts in a very clear and ſimple ſtyle, the author breaks forth into a fervid and magnificent panegyric on virginity, which he calls a precious pearl, not viſible to the multitude, and found only by few *. He concludes with the following remarkable expreſſion: "Theſe things have I written "to thee, my dear ſiſter, thou *dancing girl*

* Ω παρθενια μαργαριτα τιμιε, παρα πολλοις αφανης, ολιγοις δε μονοις ευρισκομενος!

"of

"*of Chriſt* *." The learned Dupin conſiders this indecent metaphor as a proof that the treatiſe in queſtion is not the genuine work of Athanaſius.

But if ſuch an argument were ſufficient to prove a ſaint not the author of productions aſcribed to him, the whole band of ſaintly writers might be almoſt reduced to nothing, ſince the zeal of the Catholic fathers, even when they are praiſing continence, is very apt to hurry them into the uſe of an indelicate or voluptuous image.

If the treatiſe in queſtion is not, in truth, a work of Athanaſius, it contains, however, ſuch ſentiments on the ſubject as he is known to have profeſſed. In one unqueſtioned production of this illuſtrious ſaint, there is a paſſage which not only ſhews his unbounded reſpect for virginity, but explains to us, in ſome degree, the reaſon of that extraordinary and indefatigable ardour with which the fathers in general allured

* Χορευτρια Χριστου.

the young females of their time into an eternal abſtinence from wedlock.

In the cloſe of his apology to the emperor Conſtantius, the ſpirited Athanaſius inveighs with great indignation againſt the groſs injuries which the religious virgins had ſuffered from their Arian perſecutors; and he introduces his animated invective againſt the brutality of theſe ruffians, by a ſhort but ſignificant encomium on the virginity which they inſulted. "The Catholic "church," ſays the indignant ſaint, "is ac- "cuſtomed to call the females, who poſ- "ſeſs this virtue, the ſpouſes of Chriſt; and "even the Gentiles look upon them with "wonder, as the temple of the *Word*; "for in no other ſect is the venerable and "heavenly profeſſion juſtly ſupported, but "among us Chriſtians alone; *and this, "therefore, is a great and particular evidence, "that with us there is aſſuredly the true re- "ligion* *."

* Μαλιστα γαρ και τυτο μεγα τεκμηριον εστι, τυ παρ ημιν ειναι την ουτως και αληθη θεοσεβειαν.

Sanct. Athanaſ.
Vol. i. p. 698. edit. Colon. 1686.

We

We can no longer wonder at the eagerneſs of the fathers to increaſe the multitude of monaſtic virgins, when we find they could thus produce them as an argument to confirm the truth of Chriſtianity. Hiſtory, perhaps, can hardly ſhew us a more lamentable abuſe of reaſon than this, by which an inſtitution, certainly inconſiſtent with the general good of mankind, and of courſe inconſiſtent with the genuine ſpirit and principles of our benevolent religion, is unworthily called a ſtrong evidence of its truth.

It is plain, from this paſſage, that Athanaſius gave little or no credit to profeſſions of virginity among the heathen; and his aſſertion, to conſider it in a more ludicrous light, is certainly uncandid towards the Pagan Old Maids. Some ſucceeding ſaints, in their encomiums on virginity, have treated theſe ancient ladies with a more liberal reſpect, as we ſhall ſee in the courſe of our enquiries. I will cloſe this chapter by obſerving, that a ſaint of Alexandria, who wrote

wrote many years before Athanaſius, allows that a female ſociety exiſted among the Indians, "who continued virgins, were called "*Venerable*, and ſeemed, by ſtudying the "ſtars, to acquire the powers of divina-"tion *."

* St. Clement of Alexandria, in the 3d book of his Stromata, or Miſcellanies, page 539 of the Oxford edition.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

On Saint Baſil, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

AMONG the many eccleſiaſtical writers of the fourth century, there is no character more eminent than St. Baſil, who ſucceeded to the biſhopric of Cæſarea in 369. He has been diſtinguiſhed by the appellation of *Great*, and has received, perhaps, a ſtill higher title, in being called the Chriſtian Demoſthenes.

In the works of this eloquent ſaint, we have a long and elaborate diſcourſe on *the incorruptible perfection of virginity*. He profeſſes, in the opening of this diſcourſe, which is addreſſed to an epiſcopal brother, to draw a large and complete picture of true virginity at full length; and this picture I ſhall now attempt to copy, but in the ſize of a miniature.

Saint

Saint Baſil begins, by aſſerting the great excellence of virginity: and, to explain this conſummate excellence, as he ſays, in a ſingle ſentence, he affirms, it is by this virtue alone that a human being can reſemble God. As this is the prime idea, on which almoſt all the fathers have grounded their exceſſive praiſes of monaſtic celibacy, I ſhall digreſs into one obſervation concerning it.—Although this idea had certainly a very dazzling effect, when embelliſhed by ſaintly eloquence; yet, if juſtly examined, it exhibits, to a mind not tinctured with ſuperſtition, a very ludicrous abſurdity; for in truth it is ſaying, that a human being can only reſemble the great Author of all things, by producing nothing. Surely it would be more conſiſtent, both with reaſon and piety, to ſay, that if human weakneſs may in any degree aſpire to an humble reſemblance of the Divine nature, it muſt be in the tender and faithful diſcharge of thoſe duties which belong to the parental character.—But I return to St. Baſil.

Having

Having aſſerted the infinite value of virginity, he copiouſly enumerates the many dangers, to which ſo precious and delicate a treaſure is expoſed. He fully explains to the pious virgin how an inſidious enemy may encroach on her unſuſpecting innocence, through the avenues of her five ſenſes. He dwells on the peculiar perils that belong to each; and explains how the gratification of her palate, though apparantly innocent, may inſenſibly lead her to the loſs of her chaſtity. He obſerves, that our nature conſiſts of a rational and irrationl part; that the Creator has made man like a centaur *, giving him a manly form from the head to the breaſt, and aſſigning to his lower half the nature of a beaſt. St. Baſil proceeds to ſhew the neceſſity of keeping this inferior diviſion of the human frame in perfect ſubjection to the ſuperior and more noble part; and this, he ſays, is chiefly to be effected by

* Ωσπιϱ τινα κϵντανϱον συνθϵις ο δημιουϱγος ολον τον ανθϱωπον, &c. Sanct. Baſil. de vera Virginitate, tom. i. p. 615.

refuſing

refuſing to indulge the palate with any ſavoury viands.—Having expatiated on the dangers ariſing from the ſenſe of taſting, he proceeds to the moſt perilous of all, the ſenſe of feeling: and on this point he ſeems to think it impoſſible to arm the virgin with too great a degree of caution.—"Since," exclaims the ſaint, "there is a fire in all "our limbs, thoſe who wiſh to preſerve the "body entirely free from burning, muſt "avoid the touch of every limb, leſt the "energy of this fire, reſiding in parts, "ſhould be thus communicated, not only "to the part which has been touched, but "to the whole body, and to the very ſoul "itſelf. As the throwing of a ſtone into a "reſervoir does not only agitate that part "of the water on which the ſtone fell, but, "raiſing circles one after another, drives "them with a continual agitation to the "very margin—ſo an amorous glance or a "ſpeech, containing the ſweets of licen-"tious pleaſure, being vehemently thrown, "as it were, into the ſoul of a virgin, as

"into clear water, awakening other amo-
"rous ideas, as in the deep, agitates her
"whole frame, which is ſtruck according
"to the fancy of the ſtriker."

I have tranſlated this figurative paſſage, not only as a ſpecimen of St. Baſil's eloquence, but becauſe it contains a remarkable ſimile, which occurs no leſs than three times, as Dr. Wharton has obſerved, in the writings of Pope. Whether he borrowed it from St. Baſil, or not, I ſhall leave to the deciſion of the critics, only tranſcribing thoſe lines of the poet which have the ſtrongeſt appearance of being copied from the expreſſions of the ſaint.

As on the ſmooth expanſe of cryſtal lakes
The ſinking ſtone at firſt a circle makes,
The trembling ſurface, by the motion ſtirr'd,
Spreads in a ſecond circle, then a third;
Wide and more wide the floating rings advance,
Fill all the watery plain, and to the margin dance.

Temple of Fame, ver. 436.

To

To proceed with St. Baſil.—His diſcourſe is full of metaphorical ornaments—he calls the ſenſes the windows of the ſoul, "which," ſays he, "either opens theſe windows, like "a chaſte woman, with care and modera- "tion, to admit uſeful light, or looks out "of them, like a harlot, to gaze on every "licentious ſpectacle, and diſplay her own "wanton vivacity."—Having ſhewn the neceſſity of ſecuring theſe windows with many bolts, he points out to the pious virgin the dangers that may attend her in ſcenes of nuptial feſtivity, and unreſerved converſation. He tells her, that the diſcourſe of a virgin ſhould not only be extremely pure, it ſhould alſo be moderate; ſhe ſhould rather incline to hear others than to ſpeak herſelf; and, to prove the juſtice of this maxim, the ſaint obſerves, that nature has given her two ears, and only one tongue. He excites her to the contemplation and the love of her celeſtial ſpouſe, with a magnificence of language highly calculated to dazzle and to inflame every female enthuſiaſt. He

expatiates

expatiates on the enormous ſin of corrupting a canonical virgin. He conſiders even the touch of a fraternal hand, and the ſalute of friendſhip, as dangerous familiarities.

The ſaint, having expatiated on all the rigid duties of monaſtic virginity, addreſſes the biſhop, to whom his diſcourſe is inſcribed; and concludes by obſerving, that continence is the only effectual cauſtic to fear and deſtroy the multiplying hydra of licentious deſire.

CHAP. VI.

On St. Gregory Nazianzen, and his Poem in Praiſe of Virginity.—On ſome Latin Poets of the dark Ages, who have written on the ſame Subject.

THE next holy encomiaſt of virginity may undoubtedly be conſidered as the moſt extraordinary perſon that ever reflected luſtre on the annals of the church; for he united two characters in himſelf, which ſome moroſe critics of modern times have ſuppoſed incompatible, and was both a ſaint and a poet. I mean the illuſtrious Gregory Nazianzen, the friend of the great St. Baſil; whoſe epitaph he has written, in ſome of the moſt affectionate and pathetic verſes that friendſhip ever inſpired; a compoſition that does the more honour to this canonized poet, as Baſil had mortified his ingenuous pride, by placing him in the wretched

wretched and obſcure biſhopric of Saſima; which he afterwards exchanged for the epiſcopal throne of Conſtantinople, an irkſome though ſplendid elevation; from whence he retired, in the year 381, to poetical ſolitude in the wilds of Cappadocia, where he cloſed his remarkable life, in 389, at the age of ſixty-two.

Among the various productions of this ſainted bard, we have a panegyric on virginity, containing about ſeven hundred verſes. A ſlight ſketch of this poem will, I truſt, be amuſing to my fair and curious readers. It opens with an air of triumph:

" * *Our palms, Virginity! ſhall bind thy brow:*
" *From the pure heart flow with melodious*
" *joy,*
" *Ye ſongs of purity!—The heavenly zeal*
" *Of continence is life's moſt precious gift,*
" *Out-ſhining amber, ivory, and gold;*
" *'Tis this that burſts the bondage of the*
" *world,*

* Παρθενιην στιφανοις αειαδησομεν ημετεροισιν, &c.

" And lifts the high-aſpiring ſoul to Heaven.
" Aſſiſt, ye chaſte ones, as the hymn begins:
" The virtuous all have part in Virtue's praiſe.

— — — — — — — — —

" All hail, Virginity! from God deriv'd,
" Giver thyſelf of good! of Innocence
" The lovely parent, and aſſociate fit
" For the unfetter'd ſanctities of Heaven!"

The poet proceeds to deſcant on the heavenly powers, and to celebrate the virginity of the angels. He then touches on the evils that ariſe from the fleſh, giving a ſhort account of the firſt formation of man, and the incarnation of Chriſt; he conſiders our Saviour as coming to inſtruct the world in the principles and practice of true virginity, " a condition," ſays the poetical ſaint, " as much ſuperior to marriage as heaven " is to earth, and a Divinity to a mortal."

After thus magnifying the merits of continence, the poet indulges himſelf in bold and ſpirited perſonification. He introduces Marriage and Celibacy pleading in oppoſition

ſition to each other;—Marriage ſpeaks firſt, and the poet ſeems to act fairly, by throwing into this harangue many forcible arguments in its favour; but, as I am unwilling to treſpaſs on the patience of my readers, and apprehend that ſome of them may not reliſh a very prolix ſpecimen from the poetry of a ſaint, I ſhall only tranſlate the verſes in which Virginity is introduced as replying to Marriage, and a few of the moſt ſtriking paſſages in her ſpeech.

" * *Thus Marriage.—Then, with mild and*
" *modeſt brow,*
" *In tatter'd garments, and with naked feet,*
" *With eyes to earth declin'd, with parting lips*
" *Half open held by diffidence, and cheeks*
" *Where the pure blood diffus'd a pious glow,*
" *Virginity within her looſen'd veil*
" *Hid her meek countenance, and mute re-*
" *main'd.*
" *Her let me thus encourage with due praiſe!—*

* Τοια γαμος, &c.

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" *Aſſiſt, ye chaſte ones, as the hymn begins:*
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" *Offspring of Heaven! and rich in heavenly*
power,
" *Mix'd with the choir of angels, though on*
" *earth*
" *Oft deigning to appear, in earthly ſhape—*
" *Speak here in thy defence! while by thy ſide*
" *I ſtand thy guard; for, Heaven-deſcended*
" *queen!*
" *To me thou cam'ſt, and ever may'ſt thou come,*
" *Kindly attentive to thy ſervant's prayer!*"
" *Who ſummons me reluctant to this ſcene?*
" *Me, ever bent to ſerve my heavenly Lord*
" *In daily labour, and with nightly ſong,*
" *With purifying prayer, and tears that flow*
" *To waſh out my offences? who preſumes*
" *To call me from theſe pure and pious taſks,*
" *To idle conteſt, and a war of words?*"

With this vindication of her own hallowed dignity, Virginity begins her reply; profeſſing to diſregard the opinions of men, ſhe declares that ſhe would not condeſcend to anſwer her antagoniſt, did ſhe not tremble

——" *Leſt*

* ——— " *Leſt ſome one rais'd,*
" *And fluttering in mid air, on the new plumes*
" *Of callow maidenhood, ſhould quickly ſink*
" *To earth, the victim of this artful lure.*"

On this conſideration ſhe enters on a long attempt to refute all the arguments which had been alledged by Marriage, her perſuaſive opponent. She begins, by a ſubtle diſtinction, to invalidate the plea of utility and delight ariſing from the production of children: ſhe affirms, that parents are parents only of the *bodies*, not the *minds*, of their offſpring; and, as a proof of this, ſhe aſſerts, that they only lament the bodily infirmities, and not the mental diſorders, of their progeny.

This ſatirical reflection on parental folly hardly affords ſufficient ground for the inference which the fair pleader wiſhes to draw from it; but Virginity begins to argue with

* Μη τις αερθεις
Παρθενικης νεοπηκτον ενι πτερον αιθερι νωμων
Τοις δε λογοις ενι γαιαν ολισθησειε ταχιστα.

more ſound reaſon, and with more poetical ſpirit alſo, when ſhe exclaims,

" *What mortal can depend on giving birth*
" *To ſuch an offſpring as his heart deſires!*
" *For who can tell the ſecret, how to plant*
" *The child of happy or unhappy growth?—*
" *The painter draws the image he beholds*
" *In his juſt portraiture; the ſculptor's hand*
" *Fully commands ſimilitude of form,*
" *And ductile gold obeys his plaſtic will;*
" *From perfect ſeed the happy farmer rears*
" *The perfect grain, that anſwers to his hope:*
" *But the vain mortal, who would leave on*
" *earth*
" *A copy of himſelf (however great*
" *His own integrity), cannot decide*
" *Whether his genial efforts may produce*
" *A Judas or a Paul.*

— — — — — — — — —

" *No—infants are not moulded to the wiſh*
" *Of a fond parent; but, as one who ſeeks*
" *Amuſement in the turning of the dice,*
" *Throws them, uncertain whether he may*
" *throw*

" *An*

" *An odd or even number; not his hand,*
" *But the vague movements of the dice decide:*
" *So marriage gives not birth to good or bad*
" *At the bare option of its votaries,*
" *But as the ſecret laws, or the caprice*
" *Of nature may determine.*"

Having thus ſhewn the uncertainty of thoſe parental delights, on which Marriage appeared to pride itſelf, Virginity proceeds to a magnificent encomium on her own ſuperior pleaſures, her own beauty and excellence as the chaſte ſpouſe of Chriſt. She then enumerates all the miſeries that can ariſe from the various incidents of married life. She concludes her oration by exhorting all who regard her to perſevere in a ſingle ſtate, and to place themſelves in Paradiſe by the merits of chaſtity.

The poet declares, that thoſe who heard the two pleaders, beſtowed the palm on Virginity. He concludes his poem, however, in a manner much more candid than we might have expected from one paſſage of

of it, in which Chriſt is ſaid to have been born of a virgin, that *marriage might ſink to the ground* *; for, in the three laſt verſes of this ſingular compoſition, he introduces our Saviour acting as a kind of moderator between the diſputants, by ſeating Marriage on his left hand, and Virginity on his right.

It is not in this panegyric alone that our poetical ſaint has expreſſed his affection to virginity: he has written poems of admonition to virgins, containing many hundred verſes. The points he chiefly recommends are, plainneſs of apparel, and a diſpoſition to ſolitude and ſilence. He encourages his diſciples to triumph over all the licentious paſſions, by reminding them of the ſucceſs with which human reſolution has ſubdued the moſt furious of the ſavage beaſts; as an example of this, he affirms, that he has ſeen a man riding a lion like a horſe, and a bear

* Οπως γαμος ες χθονα νευσει.

§ appearing

appearing to fly by the art of his conductor *.

The orations of this illuſtrious father contain alſo many proofs of his inceſſant attention to the intereſts of virginity; but the tender compaſſion with which he conſidered the ſufferings of the ſiſterhood, under the apoſtate Julian, ſeems to have rendered him too credulous. In his firſt invective againſt that deluded monarch, he gives an account of ſome outrages inflicted on Chriſtian virgins, too horrid to be related in this work, and, I am perſuaded, too ſavage to be true.

When we reflect on the warm heart and the elegant genius of this holy bard, we cannot but regret that he did not live in a period more propitious to the cultivation and the diſplay of his many amiable talents.

As I have devoted this chapter to a poetical encomiaſt of chaſtity, I ſhall here

* Στυγερη δε δι' ηερος αρκτος ρδευει,
Και ϐροτος εξεδιδαξεν, α μη φυσις.

break

break through the chronological line which I intended to obſerve, for the ſake of exhibiting, in one point of view, the little group of poets who ſucceſſively celebrated this maidenly perfection,

Be not alarmed, my good reader; I mean not to trouble thee with a long hiſtory of all the woeful verſe, which the idle monks have ſcribbled on the continence of every ſainted abbeſs; for though their fictions are often bold, their poetry is ſeldom entertaining.

Allow me, however, to terminate this volume with a brief account of the moſt remarkable characters in the monaſtic quire of chaſte and pious bards, who re-echoed, through the dark ages, the inceſſant praiſe of virginity.

The firſt of theſe, both in perſonal rank and in point of time, is Sextus Alcimus Avitus, nephew to the unfortunate emperor of that name. The poet became archbiſhop of Vienna, and, after acting a very buſy and important part in the Chriſtian world,

world, died, with a great reputation for ſanctity, in the year 525. This venerable bard has addreſſed to his ſiſter Fuſcina a poetical exhortation to monaſtic virginity; a ſtate to which, he tells us, many females of his family had been devoted. He excites the young Fuſcina to the virtues, that may become her religious character, by various examples; and, to teach her a brave contempt for unmerited calumny, he relates the following very ſingular anecdote; which I have ſelected, as the only amuſing paſſage in his long compoſition.

* *The world has echoed with Eugenia's fame,*
Who nobly periſh'd for her Saviour's name;
But, ere ſhe gloried in a martyr's fate,
Brave was her heart, and her atchievements great.

Her

* *Eugeniæ dudum toto celeberrima mundo*
Fama fuit, Chriſti quæ cum pro nomine vitam
Fuderit, ante tamen fortes proceſſit in actus;
Namque habitum mentita viri, non proinde virile
Pectus præficitur ſanctis a fratribus abbas.

Tum

Her ſex diſguiſing with a manly air,
She liv'd an Abbot in a houſe af prayer;
To reverend Monks ſhe taught the words of truth,
O'er age preſiding in the bloom of youth.
The fiend againſt her fram'd an helliſh plot,
Her life to threaten, and her fame to blot;
But by her innocence and modeſt care,
The latent virgin triumph'd o'er the ſnare.
Beneath the habit of a man conceal'd,
The ſad ſhe comforted, the ſick ſhe heal'd;

But

Tum patris officium complens, ac veſte virili
Fœmineum occultans ſexum, muliebria ſprevit,
Et meritis anniſque graves, longâque verendos
Religione ſenes juvenili rexit in ævo.
Tunc recti impatiens, omni qui tempore ſerpens
Mille dolos, damnique artes ter mille volutat,
Invidet Eugeniæ, et ſanctum crebreſcere frendens
Nomen, ad aſſuetas redit undique callidus artes,
Eugeniam quærens vulgo traducere; verum
Quo famam violare cupit, petit inde coronam.
Quæ ſexum mentita pie, cum munia patris
Sancte exerceret, morbiſque levaret ademptis
Quotquot ſubſidium ſancta pietate rogarent,
Jamdudum confecta gravis matrona, bonique

Nominis,

But ſoon, deluded by her manly form,
A matron, with licentious paſſion warm,
Tried, tho' in age, with her decaying charms
To lure the youthful Abbot to her arms.
When foil'd (how love will hazard each re-
ſource!)
The old and deſperate dame reſolv'd on force.
On her lone bed, in feign'd diſorder laid,
She begs the fancied holy father's aid;
And as he comes, with charitable pace,
She ſprings to ſeize him in a loath'd embrace.

The

Nominis, inſano quæ mox accenditur igne
Virginis, heu ſpecie infelix decepta virili,
Cumque pudicitiam ſanctam, doniſque doliſque
Non ſemel invaſam, fruſtra captare, nihilque
Profore ſe noſſet (quid non amor impius auſit?)
Addere vim verbis ſtatuit; longeque remotis
Arbitris, morbum ſimulans, morbique levandi
Eugeniam cauſa appellans, vi nititur illam
Opprimere, inque ſuos invitam adducere nexus:
Illa autem valido ſtuprum clamore repellens,
Auxiliumque petens magna virtute reſiſtit;
Ergo luxuriæque ſuæ matrona parandæ
Complendique expes mulier male perdita voti,
A patre Eugenio (qualem decepta putabat

Ob

The unknown virgin in the Abbot's ſhape
For ſuccour cries, and ſtruggles to eſcape.
The guilty matron, frantic with deſpair,
Frames for the fancied prieſt an impious ſnare;
Father Eugenius (ſhe proclaims aloud,
To the attentive ſlander-loving croud),
Father Eugenius, with a brutal aim,
Has tried to violate her ſpotleſs frame.
To public juſtice ſhe now makes appeal:
The elders meet: and all, with curious zeal,
All flock impatient to th' amazing cauſe,
Whoſe novelty a numerous audience draws.
Eugenius now (for, ſtill in garb the ſame,
The ſecret virgin bears that manly name)

Appears

Ob mutatum habitum longa aſſuetudine plebes)
Interpellatum ſtupri ſeſe impia fingit;
Inque forum vocat innocuam, quo protinus omnis
Turba ſenum turbata coit, quo denique cuncti
Attoniti novitate rei matreſque virique
Currunt. Interea Eugenius (ſic neſcia ſanctam
Matrem turba vocat) populo ſpectante tribunal,
Cauſam dicturus, tam diri criminis, intrat;
Et jam jamque reum ſecreti ignara tenebat
Publica vis, odio tantum inflammata ſiniſtro;

Conſcia

Appears againſt the horrid charge to plead,
Believ'd by Envy guilty of the deed.
When, with that pride which innocence allows,
The fancied criminal her fraud avows:
Aſide ſhe throws her well-ſuſtain'd diſguiſe,
Confeſt a maiden by admiring eyes.
Th' applauding populace with tranſport ſee
The devil defeated, and the virgin free.
Thus ever ſafe true Chaſtity ſhall dwell,
Secure to triumph o'er the ſnares of hell.

Conſcia cum ſexus proprii, cordiſque pudici,
Vincitur ut vincat jam virgo innoxia fraudem
Et ſexum oſtendit, dudum mentita virilem,
Fœmineum, ac fraudes populo applaudente retexit
Dæmonis.—Uſque adeo caſti cuſtodia voti
Semper tuta manet, multis licet acta procellis.

Alcimus Avitus
ad Fuſcinam Sororem.

The copy of Avitus, which I have followed, is printed in a collection of the old eccleſiaſtical poets, by George Fabricius. Baſil. quarto. I mention this circumſtance, becauſe the ſtory of Eugenia contains many more verſes in the edition of Fabricius, than Mattaire has printed in his Corpus Poetarum Latinorum.

The ſingular adventure of this female abbot will, I think, induce my reader to wiſh for a few more particulars relating to ſo intereſting a perſonage; and, by the aid of that pious and gallant hiſtorian of holy virgins, Arthur du Monſtier, I am enabled to add, that Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, a Roman of high rank, who was præfect of Alexandria in the reign of Commodus. She was diſtinguiſhed by her perſonal beauty, and adorned with every mental accompliſhment: her application to literature was great; her memory uncommonly retentive; and ſhe was equally eloquent in the Greek and Latin language. With theſe attractions, at the age of fifteen ſhe was demanded in marriage by Aquilius, the ſon of Aquilius the conſul; but the young Eugenia, being converted to Chriſtianity, made her eſcape privately from her heathen parents, and, diſguiſing herſelf in the habit of a man, took refuge in a religious houſe, not far from Alexandria. Here ſhe met with the remarkable occurrences recorded

in the poetry of Avitus. It is ſaid that ſhe converted both her parents to her new religion; that her father ſuffered martyrdom; and that Eugenia herſelf, returning to Rome with her mother, whoſe name was Claudia, experienced the ſame fate, in the reign of Gallienus.—Such is the account given of Eugenia in the curious work of Du Monſtier, intitled, Sacrum Gynecæum, a pious biographical treaſure, containing all the ſanctified females of the Chriſtian world. Her merits are celebrated by almoſt every writer who has touched upon the Catholic virgins; and her name is mentioned with honour by two ſucceeding Latin poets, of whom I am now to ſpeak.

The firſt of theſe is Venantius Fortunatus, a poet on whoſe hiſtory I enter the more willingly, as it is connected with that of a fair lady, who, if ſhe were an Old Maid, as ſome of her biographers have aſſerted, was undoubtedly among the moſt remarkable of the ſiſterhood, being at once a queen and a ſaint, a virgin and a wife.

This ſingular perſonage was the lovely princeſs Radegunda; who, being taken priſoner in her infancy by Clotaire, king of the Franks, was married in Soiſſons, at the age of fifteen, and in the year 538, to that ſavage hero, the deſtroyer of her father's kingdom, and the aſſaſſin of her brother. This unfortunate princeſs is univerſally deſcribed as a model of beauty; but her perſonal charms were ſurpaſſed by her piety. She wore an under veſt of hair-cloth, and loaded her delicate body with a chain of iron. Du Monſtier affirms, that although ſhe lived a few years with the king her huſband, ſhe obtained from that amorous monarch the privilege of remaining a virgin. The more modern author of that amuſing book, intitled "Anecdotes of the Queens of France *," is inclined to prove the falſhood of this problematical fact, by the expreſſions of her firſt biographers, who deſcribe

* Anecdotes des Reines et Regentes de France, 6 tom. 1776.

her

her as riſing early from the bed of the king. But without venturing to decide on ſo nice a queſtion, I ſhall proceed in the more certain hiſtory of Radegunda.—After reſiding three years with Clotaire, ſhe obtained his permiſſion to retire; and, founding an abbey at Poitiers, ſhe enjoyed in it all the tranquil pleaſures of religious retirement. She poſſeſſed an affection for literature; and ſhe was happy in the ſociety of two the moſt eminent authors of that age, Gregory biſhop of Tours, the hiſtorian, and Fortunatus the poet, who had the honour of being ſecretary to the pious Radegunda, and was promoted to the biſhopric of Poitiers.

Fortunatus was an Italian, of an elegant mind and inſinuating manners: it was probably to flatter the chaſte fancy of his royal miſtreſs, that he compoſed his ſingular poem "On a celeſtial Synod, and the Virtue of Virginity *." This performance opens

* De Senatu Curiæ cæleſtis, et Virtute Virginitatis. Fortunati Poem. Lib. 7.

with a full convocation of all the eminent heavenly virgins and martyrs; when they are aſſembled before the throne of God, the voice of the Divinity announces his deſign of rewarding the pious and chaſte paſſion of an earthly maiden, and deſcribes the holy tenderneſs and ardour with which ſhe panted for a celeſtial ſpouſe. The verſes that include this deſcription are remarkably ſpirited and elegant, for the age in which they were compoſed:—the maiden is repreſented as thus venting the fond enthuſiaſm of her ſoul:

* *Tell me, where art thou, whom I die to ſee!*
Where is the latent road that leads to thee?
How would I haſte my ſoul's deſire to meet,
Could ſtarry paths ſupport my pendent feet!

Now

* *Dic ubi ſis quem expecto gemens, qua te urbe requiram,*
Quave ſequar, nullis ſemita nota locis:
Ipſa venire velim properans, ſi poſſet in aſtris
Pendula ſydeream planta tenere viam.
Nunc ſine te fuſcis graviter nox incubat alis,
Ipſaque ſole micans eſt mihi cæca dies.

Lilia,

Now without thee I feel oppreſſive night,
And dark to me the ſun's meridian light.
In vain the richeſt flowers their fragrance ſhed;
For all the ſweets of earth to me are dead.
Each paſſing cloud to ſee thee I purſue,
For love directs to heaven my wandering view:
I bleſs the ſtorm on which thy feet have trod,
And aſk the winds where I may find my God.

Having proclaimed the merits of this chaſte and fervent devotee, the ſacred voice declares, that ſhe ſhall poſſeſs the ſanctity ſhe deſires; and her name is inrolled in the eternal regiſter *. The poet proceeds to tell, how the newly-conſecrated virgin is de-

Lilia, narciſſus, violæ, roſa, nardus, amomum,
Oblectant animos germina nulla meos.
Ut te conſpiciam per ſingula nubila pendo,
Et vaga per nebulas lumina ducit amor.
Ecce procelloſos ſuſpecta interrogo ventos,
Quid mihi de Domino nunciet aura meo.

* Nomen perpetuo ſcribitur inde libro.

corated with all the jewels of heaven; he affirms, however, that the chaſte and humble virtues are her beſt ornaments: he magnifies the excellence of virginity compared to the miſeries of a married life; and he concludes with a prayer, addreſſing the whole poem to the chaſte and pious Agnes, whom his royal miſtreſs Radegunda had raiſed to the dignity of abbeſs, in the religious houſe which ſhe herſelf had founded. Perhaps it may be a groundleſs conjecture, but I am inclined to believe that Fortunatus compoſed this poem with infinite art, intending an oblique and concealed compliment to the problematical virginity of Radegunda herſelf, though in the cloſe he addreſſes himſelf to Agnes as the virgin, who had thus made a kind of holiday in heaven. My conjecture ariſes from the following remarkable circumſtances:—In the long deſcription of this celeſtial ceremony, the name of this virgin, ſo intereſting to all the powers of heaven, is not once mentioned, although it is ſaid to be inſcribed in the eternal volume.

This

This ſingular omiſſion perſuades me, that the poet wiſhed to compliment ſome lady as a virgin of uncommon ſanctity, whom he did not think it prudent to name. His cold manner of addreſſing the poem to Agnes, appears to me as a kind of maſk to his real intention. Beſides, there are ſome paſſages, in his enthuſiaſtic deſcription of the chaſte female ſo highly honoured by Heaven, which do not agree with the condition of Agnes, and may be applied with an elegant propriety to his royal miſtreſs Radegunda. After deſcribing this anonymous virgin as decorated with a long catalogue of celeſtial jewels, the poet exclaims:

* *Deck'd with theſe gems a heavenly queen ſhe'll reign,*
And rule, a virgin, o'er the angelic train.

There is alſo another poem of Fortunatus, expreſsly on the virtues of Radegunda,

* *His cumulata bonis thalamo regina ſedebit,*
Atque poli ſobolem ſub pede virgo premet.

in

in which, after having compared her to the moſt celebrated of the holy virgins, for charity and abſtinence, for devotion and fortitude, he adds,

* *To ſpeak thy farther merits I refrain,*
Which from thy conſcious God full glory gain.

Such are the grounds of my conjecture: whether Radegunda was in truth an Old Maid, and whether her ingenious ſecretary intended to pay her an oblique compliment for the peculiar delicacy with which ſhe has been ſuppoſed to acquire and ſupport that venerable character, are points which I muſt now leave to the diſcuſſion of the curious. However great the chaſtity of this pious queen might be, it has not eſcaped detraction; and our poet himſelf has been ſuſpected of poſſeſſing too lively an intereſt in her heart. Some late biographers of the fair royal ſaint have conſi-

* *Cætera nunc taceam melius, quia teſte Tonante,*
Judicioque Dei, glorificata manent.

dered

dered this calumny as the immediate ſuggeſtion of the devil, provoked by the peculiar purity of Radegunda; but it appears to have ariſen rather from the careleſſneſs of ſome early writers, who, finding in the poems of Fortunatus, that he had been accuſed of being a little too fond of the abovementioned Agnes, made a miſtake in their account of this matter, and transferred his ſuppoſed affection from the abbeſs to the queen. The truth ſeems to be, that Fortunatus lived in a very pleaſing and innocent familiarity with theſe two pious ladies. They amuſed themſelves in ſending little preſents of ſweetmeats, and other monaſtic delicacies, to their ingenious friend. He acknowledged their favours with poetical gallantry. The extempore verſes which he compoſed on ſuch occaſions are printed with his poems; they do honour to the tenderneſs of his heart, and the elegance of his genius; but though they often breathe the warm ſpirit of affection, they are far from throwing any ſtain on the purity of his morals.

rals. His royal miſtreſs is ſaid, by the authors of the Literary Hiſtory of France, to have ended her life in 587: our poet died in 609, and his feſtival is yet celebrated at Poitiers, on the 14th of December.

The following pious herald of chaſtity in the dark ages was an illuſtrious character of our own country. I mean the great Aldhelm, biſhop of Shireburn in Dorſetſhire, during the Saxon heptarchy. This canonized bard was not only diſtinguiſhed by peculiar ſanctity, but excelled in the ſiſter arts of poetry and muſic, and has been celebrated as the perſon who introduced Latin verſe into England.

His poetical talents were great indeed, for the period in which he flouriſhed; and he exerted them in a compoſition of heroic verſe, extolling the moſt eminent votaries of virginity, both male and female. In the latter catalogue the following are his heroines—the Virgin Mary, and the Saints Cæcilia, Agatha, Lucia, Juſtina, Eugenia, Agnes, Thecla, Eulalia, Scholaſtica, Conſtantina,

ſtantina, Euſtochium, Demetrias, Anaſtaſia, Rufina Secunda, Anatolia, Victoria.

As a ſpecimen of Aldhelm's poetry, I ſhall ſelect his verſes on Cæcilia, whoſe talents have rendered her the moſt intereſting of female ſaints.

* *What happy page with lively praiſe may frame*
A juſt memorial to Cæcilia's name,
Who led her bridegroom's ſoul, by leſſons pure,
To ſpurn corporeal joy's luxurious lure!
Tho' fam'd for muſic's melting powers, the fair
Eſcap'd from worldly pomp, and pleaſure's ſnare.
Thus ſhe began, when, on her bridal night,
Her glowing conſort claim'd his bliſsful right:
" *For*

* *Porro Cæciliæ vivacem condere laudem*
Quæ valeat digne metrorum pagina verſu?
Quæ ſponſum proprium convertit dogmate ſancto,
Mellea carnalis contemnens ludicra luxus.
Baſia dum potius dilexit dulcia Chriſti,
Candida præpulchris complectens colla lacertis,
Quamvis harmoniis præſultent organa multis
Muſica pierio reſonent et carmina cantu,

Non

" For me behold! for me," the virgin cries,
" A tutelary ſpirit quits the ſkies:
" He, my bleſt patron! by a kind decree
" Is bound from ſenſual love to keep me free:
" No mortal, burning with impure deſire,
" May dare to touch me with licentious fire:
" My heavenly champion, with angelic ſway,
" Would force the raſh invader from his prey."
The pious bride converted thus her lord;
His ancient error he with ſcorn abhorr'd,

In

Non tamen inflexit fallax præcordia mentis
Pompa profanorum, quæ nectit retia ſanctis,
Ne forte properet paradiſi ad gaudia miles.
Talibus interea compellens vocibus inſit,
Dum ſecreta petunt conceſſa lege tororum:
" Angelus en," inquit, " ſuperis tranavit ab aſtris!
" Hic me patronus cæleſti fœdere fulcit,
" Ut nequeam prorſus quidquam carnalis amare:
" Namque meum jugiter conſervat corpus in ævum,
" Ut nullus valeat, ſpurco ſuccenſus amore,
" Contrectare mea probroſo crimine membra;
" Sed mox angelicis ulciſcens vindicat armis,
" Qui me pollutis nituntur prendere palmis."
Sic devota Deo convertit femina ſponſum:

Nec

In union chaſte the martyr's crown they gain,
And Heaven repays them for their mortal pain.

Such is Aldhelm's panegyric on the celebrated St. Cæcilia; and, as it may amuſe the curious to compare this mitred bard with our old poet Chaucer, who has told the ſame marvellous ſtory, I ſhall inſert in a note a few lines from the latter *.

The

Nec non et levirum ſolvens errore vetuſto,
Donec credentes ſumpſiſſent dona lavacri;
Facti municipes in ſummis arcibus ambo
Martyres effecti carnis tormenta luentes.
Sanct. Althelmus de Laude Virginum.
In Caniſii Theſauro, tom. i. p. 742.

The learned reader will readily pardon ſome omiſſions in the tranſlation of theſe verſes.

* *The night came, and to bedde muſt ſhe gon*
With hire huſbond, as it is the manere;
And prively ſhe ſaid to him anon—
O ſwete and wel beloved ſpouſe dere,
Ther is a conſeil, and ye wol it here,
Which that right fayn I wold unto you ſaie,
So that ye ſwere ye wol it not bewraie.

Valerian

The poem of the Saxon biſhop is to be conſidered only as a kind of ſupplement to his elaborate treatiſe in proſe on the ſame intereſting topic. The author of Aldhelm's Life in the Biographia Britannica has, by truſting to the authority of Bede, committed a miſtake in his account of theſe ſeparate performances, which he repreſents as a ſingle work of verſe and proſe intermixed. They

Valerian gan faſt unto hire ſwere,
That for no cas, ne thing that mighte be
He ſhulde never to non bewraien here;
And then at erſt thus to him ſaide ſhe—
I have an Angel, which that loveth me,
That with gret love, wher ſo I wake, or ſlepe,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe;

And if that he may felen out of drede,
That ye me touch or love in vilanie,
He right anon wol ſleen you with the dede,
And in your youthe thus ye ſhulden die:
And if that ye in clene love me gie,
He wol you love as me, for your clenenesſe,
And ſhew to you his joye and his brightneſſe.

This

They are not only diſtinct productions, but have been publiſhed apart. It appears that the proſaic eſſay was firſt written, as in the cloſe of it the author intimates his deſign of handling the ſame delicate ſubject once more, in verſe.

This Valerian, corrected as God wold,
Anſwered again—If I ſhal truſten thee
Let me that Angel ſeen, and him behold;
And if that it a veray Angel be
Than wol I don as thou haſt prayed me.
The ſecond Nonne's Tale.
Tyrwhitt's Chaucer, vol. iii. p. 70.

It is juſtly obſerved by this excellent editor, that Chaucer originally compoſed his ſtory of Cæcilia as a ſeparate work, and afterwards united it to the Canterbury Tales—that he cloſely copied the Life of Saint Cæcilia in the Golden Legend of Jacobus Jannenſis—and that he mentions his own performance in the liſt of his laudable and pious works.

And for to ſpeke of othir holineſſe,
He hath in proſe tranſlated Boece,
And made the Life alſo of Saint Cecile.
Legende of good Women.

As this chapter is already longer than I intended, I ſhall only ſelect one paſſage from his proſaic treatiſe, exhibiting a moſt ſingular ſcale of virtue (if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion) by which human merit was meaſured in the age of this accompliſhed ſaint. "* It is recorded," ſays Aldhelm, "in a certain volume, from the narration "of an angel, how virginity, chaſtity, and "wedlock, differ from each other, and "mark, in three degrees, the quality or "worthineſs of life; how, according to the

* In quodam volumine angelicâ relatione refertur, quomodò virginitas, caſtitas, jugalitas, tripertitis gradibus ſeparatim differant; quæ, ſicut trifariâ diſpari vitæ qualitate, ſigillatim ſequeſtrantur; ita diſcretis meritorum ordinibus tripliciter dirimuntur, angelo hoc modo alternatim diſtinguente: ut ſit virginitas aurum, caſtitas argentum, jugalitas æramentum; ut ſit virginitas divitiæ, caſtitas mediocritas, jugalitas captivitas; us ſit virginitas ſol, caſtitas luna, jugalitas tenebræ; ut ſit virginitas dies, caſtitas aurora, jugalitas nox.—P. Aldhelmi Liber de Laudibus Virginitatis, cap. xix. edit. Wharton. 4to. London, 1693.

"angel's

" angel's diſcrimination, virginity is gold, " chaſtity ſilver, and wedlock braſs; how " virginity is wealth, chaſtity a competence, " and wedlock poverty; how virginity is " peace, chaſtity redemption, and wedlock " captivity; how virginity is the ſun, chaſ- " tity the moon, and wedlock darkneſs; " how virginity is day, chaſtity the dawn, " and wedlock night."

The ingenious prelate continues to illuſtrate this angelical diviſion of human merits by many more metaphors of equal force, and then tells us the preciſe meaning of theſe three ſignificant terms—a neceſſary explanation, as, without it, a modern reader would be little able to underſtand the anonymous angel thus quoted by Aldhelm! " Virginity," ſays the good biſhop, " is a " voluntary attachment to a ſingle life; " chaſtity is that ſtate of purity obſerved " by thoſe who, after the ceremony of " marriage, ſeparate, and abſtain from ma- " trimonial intercourſe, for the ſake of " heaven, deſpiſing that ordinary wed-

" lock by which children are lawfully pro-
" duced."

This very curious triple eſtimate of human merit occurs alſo in the poem on virginity; and, as that poem is extremely ſcarce, I ſhall tranſcribe the verſes.

Humani generis triplex diſtantia fertur,
Quæ modo per mundum triquadro cardine degit,
Et ſtudet in terris mercari regna Tonantis.
Denique nonnullos ſortitur vita jugalis,
Qui rectè vivunt conceſſa lege tororum,
Et præcepta Dei toto conamine mentis
Conſervare ſtudent, thalami ſub jure manentes.
Poſthæc caſtrorum gradus alter, et ordo ſecundus
Subſequitur, nupti, qui jam connubia ſpernunt,
Ac indulta ſibi ſcindunt retinacula luxûs.
Lurida linquentes ſpurcæ conſortia carnis,
Ut caſtis proprium conſervent moribus ævum,
Dum connexa prius thalamorum vincula rumpunt.
Tertia virgineis fulgeſcit vita lucernis,
Cujus præcellit præfatos infula ritus.
Mundani luxûs calcans ludibria falſa,

Virginitas ſummo virtutum vertice floret,
Dum ſoror angelicæ conſtet caſtiſſima vitæ.

Sanct. Althelmus, ut ſupra.

Such was the doctrine of the famous Aldhelm, which throws a conſiderable light on the practices of the times in which he lived, when the great purpoſe of marriage was often defeated, as in the caſe of King Edward the Confeſſor, by a vain pretenſion to ſuperior ſanctity. This poetical prelate was ſo paſſionate an admirer of pure virginity, that he put his own continence to many ſingular and dangerous trials. It is related by his elegant and affectionate biographer, William of Malmſbury, that Aldhelm did not, like other prieſts, avoid the company of women, but often detained ſome virgin by his ſide, both ſitting and lying, and, while he held her in his embraces, repeated his whole pſalter, to the confuſion of the devil *.

However

* Vel aſſidens vel cubitans aliquam detinebat, quoad carnis tepeſcente lubrico, quieto et immoto diſcederet

However this conduct might encreaſe the veneration which was paid to this extraordinary ſaint, I cannot help condemning it as an inſtance of cruelty and injuſtice.

Great as his exultation and triumph might be, on thus deriding the devil, as his biographer expreſſes it, by a marvellous diſplay of his own ſubdued deſires, he had certainly no right to ſport ſo wantonly with the paſſions of thoſe religious Old Maids (for they could hardly be young ones) whom he thus made the uneaſy inſtruments of his own chaſte reputation.

In ſpeaking of the moſt eminent poets, who amuſed the dark ages by celebrating the wonderful virgins of that period, I ought not to omit the venerable Bede. He has enlivened his eccleſiaſtical hiſtory,

diſcederet animo. Derideri ſe videtur diabolus, cernens adhærentem fœminam virumque aliàs avocato animo inſiſtentem cantando pſalterio.

Wil. Malmſ. de Vita Aldhelmi,
Anglia Sacra, vol. ii. p. 13.

by inſerting a poetical panegyric on the chaſte Ædilthryda, a lady who choſe to fly from the bed and throne of her huſband Ecfrid, king of Northumberland, for the ſake of preſerving her virginity in a cloiſter. For this pious exploit ſhe is extolled in the higheſt terms by the holy bard; who, in ſinging her praiſes, ſeems to felicitate himſelf, with a gallant complacency, that he is ſuperior to Virgil in the happy choice of his ſubject *. It is, however, remarkable, that the greateſt poet of our country has mentioned this obſtinate royal virgin in terms of indignation and reproach. Milton, in his Hiſtory of England, has condeſcended to relate the adventure of this pious fugitive, in the following language:— "Another adverſity befel Ecfrid in his fa- "mily, by means of Ethildrith his wife,

* *Bella Maro reſonet, nos pacis dona canamus:*

— — — — — — — — — —

— — — — — — — — — —

Luxus erit lubricis, carmina caſta mihi.

Bedæ Hymnus de Ædilthryda.

" king Anna's daughter, who, having taken " him for her huſband, and profeſſing to " love him above all other men, perſiſted " twelve years in the obſtinate refuſal of " his bed, thereby thinking to live the " purer life; ſo perverſely then was chaſtity " inſtructed againſt the apoſtle's rule: at " length obtaining of him, with much im- " portunity, her departure, ſhe veiled her- " ſelf a nun, then, made abbeſs of Ely, died " ſeven years after the peſtilence; and might " with better warrant have kept faithfully " her undertaken wedlock, though now " canonized St. Audrey of Ely*."

Milton has not deigned to enter into a very whimſical part of this lady's hiſtory; but a monaſtic hiſtorian informs us, that her huſband, repenting of the indulgence he had granted to her, and inflamed with new deſire, determined to force her from her religious retreat, and to conſummate his

* Milton's Hiſtory of England, page 76, Birch's edition.

marriage:

marriage: ſhe eſcaped both from his love and his reſentment, by a ſeries of the moſt extraordinary miracles, which the curious reader may find very circumſtantially related in the firſt volume of Dugdale's Monaſticon. After ſuſtaining great hardſhips, ſhe is ſaid to have expired a perfect virgin, in the year 679; and the miracles diſplayed at her tomb were not inferior to thoſe by which her life was diſtinguiſhed.

I cannot cloſe the chapter without lamenting the ſufferings of the fair ſex in the ages of ignorance and ſuperſtition. When all the ſaints of the time moſt zealouſly aſſerted, that it was meritorious in a married woman to remain a virgin, domeſtic life muſt have been frequently embittered by tragi-comical contention; and, perhaps, the mind of many a well-meaning woman has been half diſtracted by the ſtruggle, which ſuch doctrine may have produced, between tenderneſs and devotion. It may, however, afford us ſome conſolation to reflect, that whenever theſe good ladies were miſled by the prieſthood

hood into a painful ſacrifice of innocent delight, their pride was inceſſantly gratified by the pious honours that were laviſhed upon their rigid virginity: yet their paſſion for ſuch honours was ſometimes repreſſed by the ſtronger feelings of perſonal vanity, as we may collect from a ludicrous miracle related by Gregory of Tours. That hiſtorian gives us a circumſtantial account of a noble and pious pair, who, being married in their youth, paſſed through life together with this extraordinary continence, at the particular requeſt of the lady. She happened to die firſt, and, as her good man attended her funeral, he exclaimed, while the body was ſinking into the grave, "I thank "thee, eternal God, that as I received this "treaſure from thee, ſo I return it immaculate to thy goodneſs." Upon this the dead lady ſaid with a ſmile, "Why do you "mention matters on which you are not "interrogated * ?"—The ſequel of the miracle

* Multos poſteà in uno ſtrato recumbentes annos vixerunt cum caſtitate laudabili, quod poſtea in eorum tranſitu

racle is not leſs ſtriking. The huſband died ſoon afterwards, and though he was buried in a tomb not contiguous to that of his wife, it was obſerved, the next day, that their ſepulchres were united. The devout hiſtorian ſeems to conſider theſe incidents as proofs of the moſt ſignal chaſtity; but they may with as much reaſon be alledged as proofs, that the ſpotleſs lady, who had ſo ſtrongly petitioned her huſband to releaſe her from the duties of a wife, did not reliſh his public declaration that ſhe died an Old Maid.

tranſitu declaratum eſt. Nam cum impleto certamine puella migraret ad Chriſtum, peracto vir funeris officio, cum puellam in ſepulchrum deponeret, ait, "Gratias tibi ago, æterne Domine noſter, quia hunc "theſaurum, ſicut a te commendatum accepi, ita im-"maculatum pietati tuæ reſtituo." Ad hæc illa ſubridens, "Quid," inquit, "loqueris quod non inter-"rogaris?" Greg. Turonenſis Hiſt. Francorum, lib. i. cap. 42.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

On Saint Gregory of Nyſſa, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

I RETURN from the chaſte and pious poets to the proſaic encomiaſts of virginity. On examining the eccleſiaſtical writers who have merited this title, I find they are ſuch a hoſt, that I fear the attention of my reader would deſert me, if I attempted to enumerate and deſcribe them. I ſhall now, therefore, confine myſelf to four ſucceeding fathers of the church, who are entitled to our regard by the higheſt reputation for ſanctity and eloquence; and from theſe I ſhall only ſelect, as briefly as I can, ſuch paſſages as ſeem to throw a particular light on the ſiſterhood, and are at the ſame time remarkable for ſtrength and originality either of thought or expreſſion.

The

The firſt of the four is St. Gregory of Nyſſa, a younger brother of the great St. Baſil, and a friend and correſpondent of the poetical St. Gregory, who formed the principal ſubject of our laſt chapter. The St. Gregory of whom I am now to ſpeak, was ordained biſhop of Nyſſa, in Cappadocia, by his brother St. Baſil, in 372; in 385 he preached the funeral ſermon of the empreſs Placilla; and by a late writer he is ſaid to have died in 396, with the venerable title of Father of the Fathers.

The panegyric which this ſaint compoſed on virginity is the more remarkable, as we have poſitive evidence that he was himſelf a married man. This circumſtance, however, is very far from having rendered him a languid advocate for the excellence of a ſingle life; on the contrary, having aſſerted the dignity of this celeſtial excellence, he laments his own grovelling condition, in being precluded by marriage from a ſhare of this glory. "A knowledge of the charms that "belong to celibacy, is to me," ſays St. Gregory,

Gregory, "what food is to the ox, when, "turned to a full rack, he is prevented "from reaching it by his harneſs."—Having forcibly deſcribed his own mortifications by this ſtriking image, he enlarges on the various evils that ariſe from matrimony, which he conſiders as a great ſource, not only of unhappineſs, but of guilt.—"Look," ſays he, "at the paſſing ſcene—"marriage is the general prologue to all "the tragedies of life."—After painting the conjugal ſtate in the moſt gloomy colours, he delineates, with a brilliant pencil, the pure delights of virginity, which he repreſents as a certain art and power of eluding all the vexations of earth, and attaining, even on this ſide the grave, the beatitude of heaven.

Having declaimed againſt wedlock with much freedom, or rather contempt and ſcorn, the ſaint ſeems to apprehend that his zeal for chaſtity has carried him too far, and he makes the following remarkable apology.

"Let

"Let no one," ſays he, "imagine that I "intend to cenſure the eſtabliſhment of "marriage; for I am aware that it has not "wanted the approbation of God: but, ſince "nature ſufficiently inſtigates mankind to "people the world by this connection, it "would be ſuperfluous labour to compoſe "an encomium on marriage, which finds, "in the alluring voice of pleaſure, an eter-"nal advocate and patron; while virginity "is in ſome meaſure the antagoniſt of na-"ture *. My ſentiments on matrimony," continues the ſaint, "are theſe:—we ought "to prefer to it the care of our celeſtial in-"tereſt, and yet not to deſpiſe the perſon "who makes a wiſe and temperate uſe of "this inſtitution."

Though the ſaint, in the preceding ſentence, has conſulted his own perſonal credit as a married man, he very candidly proceeds to declare, that "although marriage may

* Ἀνίβαινει δὲ πως ἡ παρθενια τῃ φυσει.

S. Greg. Nyſſ. p. 568.

"be

" be regarded as a kind of ſafe port againſt " the tempeſts of licentious paſſion, yet vir- " ginity affords a ſecurer refuge, and a " more tranquil harbour."

He contends, that man, as originally created, was perfectly free from all animal deſires; and, inſtead of receiving pleaſure from the gratification of ſenſual appetite, delighted only in the contemplation of his Maker. He alledges, it is evident from ſcripture *, that Adam had no connubial intercourſe with Eve till after their expulſion from Paradiſe, when woman was condemned to the pains of child-birth, as a puniſhment for diſobedience. " Therefore," continues the ſaint, " as we loſt Paradiſe by " the ſenſual offence of our firſt parents, it " is in our own power to regain it by a vo- " luntary ſacrifice of all ſenſual pleaſures. " As the perſons who have wandered from " their own country, and wiſh to return to " it, begin by quitting the place to which

* See Geneſis chap. iv.

" they

" they have ſtrayed; in the ſame manner, " ſince marriage was the laſt ſtep which " completed our ſeparation from Paradiſe, I " would adviſe thoſe who are ambitious of " returning thither, to begin by relinquiſh- " ing marriage, the *laſt ſtage* *, *as it were*, in " the road between earth and heaven."

St. Gregory proceeds to prove the dominion of virginity over death, which he accompliſhes by a ſingular mode of reaſoning:—" The production of children," ſays he, " does not miniſter ſo much to life as to " death, ſince their birth only leads to their " diſſolution; but they who devote their " perſons to virginity, place themſelves as a " kind of iſthmus between life and death, to " ſtop the fury of the latter. The devaſta- " tion of death is thus prevented; for, as " the power of fire cannot ſubſiſt without " fuel, ſo the force of death cannot prevail, " unleſs marriage ſupplies him with his " prey."

* Ωσπερ τινα σταθμον ισχατον.

The ſaint now enters on a more minute deſcription of virginity; which does not, he ſays, conſiſt merely in perſonal purity, but in diſcharging all the duties of a tranquil and ſpotleſs mind. He borrows, on this occaſion, from his brother St. Baſil the remarkable ſimile, which I have already mentioned, of the ſucceſſive circles produced in water by the impulſe of a ſingle ſtone; an image which he uſes to illuſtrate the agitation produced in a peaceful mind by the admiſſion of any one inordinate deſire.—"Let virgi-" nity," ſays the ſaint, "be the foundation " on which the works of virtue are raiſed; " for, excellent and honourable as it is, if " this purity of perſon is not united to inte-" grity of mind—if the whole life of a virgin " does not correſpond to this profeſſed ex-" cellence—if ſhe is blackened by inconti-" nence of ſpirit—her virginity is but an ear-" ring in the noſe of a ſow, or a pearl trod-" den under the feet of ſwine *."

* Τυτο εστι το εναντιον εκειvο το εν τη ρινι της συος, η ο μαργαριτης ο εν τοις ποσι των χοιρων καταπατευμενος.

Sanct. Greg. Nyſſ. p. 593.

I muſt

I muſt not omit the whimſical conceit with which St. Gregory aſſerts the honour of Miriam, the ſiſter of Aaron, as the primitive model of true virginity. Having deſcribed her dancing with a timbrel in her hand, after the miraculous paſſage through the Red Sea, he imagines that this muſical inſtrument is mentioned in ſcripture as a ſymbol of her chaſtity, on account of the ſimilarity, which he diſcovers between virginity and the timbrel—a wonderful ſimilarity! which Gregory has explained in language that I forbear to copy, leſt the chaſte eyes of the modern ſiſterhood ſhould be ſhocked by the expreſſive images of this fanciful ſaint.

In a former part of my work I had occaſion to remark, that Miriam was not entitled to this diſtinction, as ſhe, in all probability, was a married woman. The genius and talents of this fair Hebrew ſeem, indeed, to have operated like thoſe of a modern fine lady, who, eclipſing her huſband by the brilliancy

of her ſpirit, reduces him to ſuch inſignificance, that he is rarely mentioned.

But to conclude this brief account of St. Gregory. In the ſubſequent part of his diſcourſe, he endeavours to ſettle the juſt medium between luxury and extreme abſtinence, as he is far from being a friend to that rigorous diſcipline by which the health of many a monaſtic recluſe has been deſtroyed. The twenty-fourth and laſt chapter of his treatiſe is very remarkable; for, inſtead of declaiming, like moſt of the fathers, againſt the depravity of the times, he ſpeaks of his own age as abounding in good examples.—"Sanctity," ſays he, "is now, if ever, in ſo "flouriſhing a ſtate, that it wants but little "to reach the ſummit of perfection."—He concludes, by recommending it to thoſe who wiſh to lead a virgin life, to put themſelves under the guidance of an experienced and venerable conductor.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

On St. Ambroſe, and his ſeveral Compoſitions in Praiſe of Virginity.

THE Latin fathers of the church were by no means inferior to the Greek, in the zealous veneration which they paid to virginity. The chaſte devotees of Italy found an ardent, indefatigable advocate and patron in the celebrated St. Ambroſe, who was unexpectedly raiſed, by the voice of the people, from a civil ſtation to the rank of an archbiſhop; and, having filled the epiſcopal throne of Milan about twenty years, ended his active and glorious life in that city at the age of 57, in the year 394.

This eminent writer devoted ſeveral diſtinct performances to the conſecrated virgins. There are three of his productions that particularly claim our attention, and of theſe I ſhall ſpeak as they occur.—The firſt,

and moſt elaborate, is a Treatiſe on Virgins, divided into three books, and addreſſed to his ſiſter Marcellina; who, hearing that he had preached with ſingular eloquence on this intereſting topic, and being unable to attend his public diſcourſes, requeſted from her brother the particulars of his doctrine.

Saint Ambroſe begins his treatiſe with ſingular humility, in comparing himſelf to the ſpeaking aſs of Balaam. He then takes occaſion, from the feſtival of St. Agnes, to celebrate the excellence of that virgin martyr, a Roman damſel, diſtinguiſhed by her rank and beauty, who, with miraculous fortitude, at the age of thirteen, preferred the tortures of perſecution to the rich offers of a Pagan lover, and periſhed by the ſword in the beginning of the fourth century. It may be worth remarking, that the merits of this infant martyr have given riſe to many the moſt ſpirited of pious panegyrics; and that her name has been extolled by a ſucceſſion of biſhops, ſaints, and poets, from the

the vehement Ambroſe to the tender and elegant Maſſillon, biſhop of Clermont, whoſe works contain a moſt beautiful and pathetic ſermon on the feſtival of this lovely martyr.

From the praiſe of Agnes, St. Ambroſe proceeds to a general encomium on chaſtity, which was unknown, he ſays, or imperfectly preſerved, through all the nations of the heathen world.—"But how," ſays the ſaint, very candidly, "can the human un-"derſtanding comprehend what nature has "not included in her laws *?"—He then endeavours to prove, that celibacy is an inſtitution of God, and heaven the true country of virgins. He expreſsly aſſerts that the preſervation of chaſtity makes an angel, and the loſs of it a devil †. He compares the condition of the wife, condemned

* Quis autem humano eam poſſit ingenio comprehendere, quam nec natura ſuis incluſit legibus?
Divi Ambroſii de Virginibus, Lib. 1.

† Qui eam ſervavit angelus eſt, qui perdidit, diabolus.

to the pains of child-birth, with the happy freedom of the conſecrated maiden. He makes a very ſubtle and powerful addreſs to parents, perſuading them to atone for their own offences, by the early conſecration of their virgin daughters; an exhortation which muſt have contributed very cruelly to increaſe the number of wretched and involuntary Old Maids, as many ſuperſtitious and ſelfiſh parents were undoubtedly ready to make their own peace with Heaven, at the expence of their unfortunate offſpring.

Saint Ambroſe mentions, with exultation, the ſwarms of pious damſels that haſtened to receive the veil from his hand, not only from the neighbouring cities of Italy, but from the diſtant regions of Mauritania. He exhorts the young virgins to diſregard all domeſtic impediments to their religious deſires, and to embrace a monaſtic life in expreſs oppoſition to the authority of their parents. He endeavours to juſtify this bold advice by a remarkable anecdote, which concludes

concludes the firſt diviſion of his treatiſe, and which I ſhall copy, to render my fair readers acquainted with the ſingular ſtyle of this ſaint.—" If you believe not the words " of Heaven," cries Ambroſe, " yet be- " lieve examples. In our memory, a dam- " ſel, once noble by her worldly rank, and " now more ennobled by her attachment to " God, being urged to marriage by her " parents and relations, fled for refuge to " the altar; and where can a virgin ſeek a " better aſylum, than that holy ſpot where " the ſacrifice of virginity is preſented? " But even here ſhe was troubled with im- " pious importunity. She ſtood by the altar " of God as the offering of modeſty, as " the victim of continence. 'Why are you " ſo anxious for my nuptials?' ſhe exclaim- " ed to her relations—'I am betrothed al- " ready. You offer me a huſband, but I " have found a better. Exaggerate the " riches, boaſt the nobility, proclaim the " power, of the party you propoſe; I have

" choſen

" choſen *Him* to whom no one can be com-
" pared; rich in the world, powerful in
" dominion, pre-eminent in heaven. If
" you have ſuch to offer, I do not refuſe the
" option; but if you find not ſuch, your
" conduct towards me is rather envious
" than provident.'—One of her relations,
" obſerving the reſt were ſilenced, abrubtly
" ſaid, 'What if your father were living,
" would he ſuffer you to remain unmar-
" ried?'—The virgin anſwered, with new
" religious fervour, and more temperate
" piety, 'On this account, perhaps, he
" died, that he might not prove an impe-
" diment to the ſanctity of his daughter.'—
" This reply concerning her father proved
" a kind of prophecy to her relation, as
" he alſo expired ſoon after it, and the vir-
" gin ſucceeded in her holy purpoſe. Ob-
" ſerve, ye maidens, this reward of devo-
" tion! Beware, ye parents, of a ſimilar of-
" fence!"

Saint Ambroſe, having thus magnified the excellence of virginity in the firſt diviſion

ſion of his diſcourſe, propoſes, in the ſecond, to inſtruct the young virgin in the particulars of her duty; and, to guard himſelf from the imputation of arrogance, he offers to his fair diſciples, not a collection of ſevere precepts, but of ſplendid examples. Having exhorted them to imitate the humility of the Virgin Mary, and the fortitude of the martyr Thecla, he relates a recent inſtance of female chaſtity and reſolution in the intereſting adventures that befel a young and beautiful virgin of Antioch, who, on her refuſal to worſhip the Pagan Divinities, was dragged into a public brothel, where her chaſtity was expoſed to the moſt imminent danger, but was happily preſerved by the fervour of her eloquence, and the ſincerity of her virtue. She made a convert and a friend of the heathen ſoldier who had taken an active part in the outrage ſhe endured, and inſpired her perſecutor with ſuch pity and eſteem, that he attempted, at the hazard of his own life, to preſerve the purity which he had deſigned to violate. By an exchange

of

of dreſs, he contrived the eſcape of the virgin, but was himſelf condemned to die for the pious deception. The heroic virgin bravely ruſhed from her concealment to intercept the fate of her generous deliverer. They mutually contended for the glory of dying for each other. Their religious heroiſm was derided by the barbarity of perſecution, and the only indulgence they obtained, was that of periſhing together.

It is remarkable, that this pathetic little ſtory has employed the pen of a famous French poet, and of an Engliſh philoſopher of equal eminence. The *Theodore* of Corneille, as he informs us himſelf, was founded on this anecdote related by St. Ambroſe; and, among the juvenile works of our great Boyle, we find the martyrdom of Theodora and Didymus. But the tragedy of the ſublime poet, and the narrative of the benevolent philoſopher, are both ſunk into ſimilar neglect; a circumſtance ſufficiently accounted for by a lively remark of Voltaire, who obſerves, very juſtly, on this play of

Corneille, that "he choſe the ſubject be-
" cauſe he had more genius than taſte;" an obſervation, perhaps, as applicable to the Engliſh philoſopher as to the French poet; and certainly ſtill more applicable to the Latin ſaint; for Ambroſe has related theſe adventures in a quaint and conceited ſtyle, full of indecency and affectation. I have therefore declined a tranſlation of the paſſage, from the perſuaſion that my readers would be more entertained by a ſhorter and more ſimple recital of this affecting ſtory. I ſhall add to it the curious remarks which Corneille has made on St. Ambroſe, to conſole himſelf for the ill ſucceſs of his tragedy. —"* Certainly," ſays this great, though unequal poet, "we may congratulate our-
" ſelves

* Certes il y a de quoi congratuler à la pureté de notre théâtre, de voir qu'une hiſtoire qui fait le plus bel ornement du ſecond livre des Vierges de Saint Ambroiſe, ſe trouve trop licentieuſe pour y être ſupportée, Qu'eût-on dit, ſi, comme ce grand docteur de l'egliſe, j'euſſe fait voir Theodore dans le lieu infâme, ſi j'euſſe

" ſelves on the purity of our theatre, in ſee-
" ing that a ſtory, which forms the moſt
" beautiful ornament in St. Ambroſe's ſe-
" cond book upon virgins, is found too li-
" centious to be endured. What would
" they have ſaid, if, like that great doctor
" of the church, I had exhibited Theodora
" in a houſe of infamy, if I had deſcribed
" the various agitations of her ſoul while
" ſhe remained in that ſcene, if I had ex-
" preſſed the trouble that ſhe felt in the
" moment when ſhe ſaw Didymus enter?
" It is here that this great ſaint diſplays
" the triumph of his eloquence, it is for
" this ſpectacle that he particularly invites
" the virgins to open their eyes."

j'euſſe décrit les diverſes agitations de ſon ame durant qu'elle y fut, ſi j'euſſe figuré les troubles qu'elle y reſſentit au premier moment qu'elle y vit entrer Didyme? C'eſt là-deſſus que ce grand ſaint fait triompher ſon éloquence, & c'eſt pour ce ſpectacle qu'il invite particuliérement les vierges à ouvrir les yeux.

Corneille, edit. de Voltaire, tom. iii. p. 143.

Such

Such are the reflections of Corneille, in the epiſtle dedicatory to his unfortunate Theodora; and doubtleſs it was a conſolation to the poet, in his recent diſgrace, to recollect that he was infinitely more delicate than the canonized archbiſhop of Milan.

The third book of St. Ambroſe opens with a recital of many pious precepts, delivered to Marcellina, the ſiſter of our ſaint, by the pope Liberius, on the day when ſhe received the veil from his hands. The points which the pontiff particularly recommended were, temperance and taciturnity: the latter is perpetually enjoined by the fathers, as one of the capital perfections in a conſecrated virgin. St. Ambroſe pays his ſiſter the compliment of acknowledging, that her virtue had not only equalled, but even exceeded, the diſcipline of Liberius, and ſpecifies her great merit in the articles of abſtinence and prayer. Yet, notwithſtanding the extreme ſanctity of her character, he preſents to her a long admonition concerning the dangers that attend the gaiety of

nuptial entertainments, and the wanton enormity of dancing. He then anſwers a queſtion of Marcellina's, on a very delicate topic, Whether the religion which forbids ſelf-deſtruction, allows the virgin to deſtroy her own life for the preſervation of her faith and her virginity? St. Ambroſe decides the point, by the example of Pelagia, a virgin of Antioch, who, at the age of fifteen, threw herſelf into a river to eſcape from licentious perſecution. The particulars of Pelagia's death are ſingularly ſtriking, and the flouriſhes of St. Ambroſe, in relating her ſtory, not leſs ſo. The ſpirit of this young martyr induced her virgin ſiſters, and even her mother, to ſhare her fate. St. Ambroſe deſcribes this heroic family advancing, hand in hand, to the brink of a torrent, with their perſecutors behind them; and he makes theſe undaunted females addreſs the river in the following expreſſions:—"Be-
"hold the water! who forbids us to be
"baptized? Let the water receive us,
"which is the ſource of regeneration—let
"the

"the water receive us, by which virgins "are made — let the water receive us, "which opens heaven, closes hell, hides "death, and produces martyrs *." — The saint relates, that they added to this address a short prayer for the decent preservation of their bodies; "after which," says he, "unbinding their garments, so as to guard "their modesty, and yet leave their steps "free, and then joining hands, as if to "lead a dance, they plunged together, into "the deepest part of the flood †."

Besides the example of Pelagia, St. Am-

* Ecce aqua! Quis nos baptizari prohibet? Excipiat nos aqua, quæ regenerare consuevit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ virgines facit—excipiat nos aqua, quæ cœlum aperit, inferos tegit, mortem abscondit, martyres reddit.

† Incincto sinu quo pudorem tegerent, nec gressum impedirent, consertis manibus, tanquam choros ducerent, in medium progrediuntur alveum; ubi unda torrentior, ubi profundum abruptius, illò vestigia dirigentes. Divi Ambrosii de Virg. lib. iii.

broſe reminds his ſiſter of the reſolution diſplayed by a chaſte female of their own family, who periſhed, he ſays, in the ſevereſt tortures without a groan or a tear.

In the cloſe of his elaborate treatiſe, St. Ambroſe enters into a long and very warm vindication of his own conduct. He had been accuſed, it ſeems (and certainly with juſtice) of alluring young maidens to relinquiſh the natural idea of ſettling themſelves in marriage, and to take the monaſtic vow. Inſtead of denying, he glories in the charge. "Can that conduct," exclaims the ſaint, "be conſidered as a crime in me, "which has always reflected honour on the "prieſthood, to ſow the ſeeds of perfection, "and promote an attachment to virginity?" —He then proceeds to examine, whether his doctrine can be cenſured, either as diſhoneſt, or new, or unprofitable; and his reaſoning on theſe three points is highly curious:—"If you call it diſhoneſt," ſays the ſaint, "you muſt alſo apply that appella-"tion to the life of the angels; for they

"neither

" neither marry, nor are given in marriage.
" Can it be condemned as a novelty? I
" conſent to abjure all things as novelties,
" which are not taught us by Chriſt; but
" does he not deliver the ſame doctrine,
" when he ſays, 'There are eunuchs which
" have made themſelves eunuchs for the
" kingdom of heaven*?' Virginity is
" therefore ſanctified by a celeſtial voice,
" and recommended by the precepts of our
" Lord.—But ſince we have thus proved,
" that the doctrine of continence is neither
" diſhoneſt nor new, let us enquire if it can
" be reckoned unprofitable. I have heard
" many people exclaim, that the world is
" periſhing—that the human race will be-
" come extinct — that wedlock is ruined.
" I only aſk, in reply, did ever any man
" ſeek a wife without being able to find
" one?—If any one thinks that the human
" race will be diminiſhed by the conſecra-
" tion of virgins, let him conſider, that

* Matth. chap. xix.

" where there are few virgins, there are " fewer men. Where the devotion to vir- " ginity is frequent, there the number of " men is much greater. Obſerve what " multitudes are annually admitted to the " veil in the churches of the Eaſt, and of " Africa. The men born in this country, " are fewer than the virgins that are conſe- " crated there *."

With the citation of this curious fact, I ſhall cloſe my account of St. Ambroſe's larger treatiſe on virgins, as the reſidue of that work conſiſts only of paſſages from ſcripture very whimſically united.

The ſecond compoſition of our illuſtrious ſaint, on this intereſting topic, is entitled, " An Exhortation to Virgins." It was written as a compliment to Juliana, an opulent widow, who, having devoted her whole family, conſiſting of a ſon and three daughters, to a re-

* Diſcite quantas Alexandrina, totiuſque Orientis, et Africana eccleſia, quotannis ſacrare conſueverint. Pauciores hic homines prodeunt quam illic virgines conſecrantur. Divi Ambroſ. de Virg. lib. iii.

ligious

ligious life, employed her fortune in building a church at Florence, which ſhe requeſted St. Ambroſe to conſecrate. Upon this ceremony the ſaint introduces Juliana in his diſcourſe, extolling to her children the excellence of virginity in oppoſition to marriage. He makes her declare, that although ſhe had a good huſband, ſhe laments that ſhe was ever married; and that nothing can conſole her for having forfeited, in her own perſon, the grace of virginity, but the hope of proving the mother of holy virgins. But the moſt remarkable paſſage in this ſingular work is a very whimſical pun. St. Ambroſe, deriving the word *nubere*, to marry, from *nubes*, a cloud, purſues his conceit with great ſolemnity, and gravely demonſtrates the ſimilitude between a married woman and a heavy exhalation *. The

* Et verè graves nubes, quæ ſuſtinent ſarcinam matrimonii. Nam etiam gravari alvo feruntur, cum ſemina conceptionis acceperint.

Divi Ambroſii ad Virg. Exhortatio, p. 108. edit. Baſil.

diſcourſe contains many ſentiments and precepts, exactly ſimilar to thoſe of the preceding treatiſe, and concludes with an encomium on the piety of Juliana.

The third work, which St. Ambroſe devoted to the holy ſiſterhood, has two different titles, being ſometimes called *The Inſtitution of a Virgin*, and ſometimes, *A Diſcourſe on the perpetual Virginity of the Virgin Mary*, which St. Ambroſe very zealouſly ſupported againſt Bonoſus, a biſhop condemned by the council of Capua, for the oppoſite opinion. The ſaint alledges ſix arguments in favour of the point which he intends to prove; but, as the Catholic critics juſtly obſerve that ſome of theſe arguments have more wit than ſolidity, I ſhall decline an account of them, from a reverence to the hallowed perſonage of whom they ſpeak.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

On St. Chryſoſtom, and his Panegyric on Virginity.

IF the pious virgins of Italy had reaſon to admire the zeal which the holy Ambroſe diſplayed in their behalf, thoſe of Conſtantinople enjoyed a patron and paſtor yet more admirable in the famous St. Chryſoſtom, who equalled the archbiſhop of Milan in his enthuſiaſtic veneration for celibacy, with the inſinuating advantage of a ſuperior eloquence. This talent, from which he received the appellation of Chryſoſtom, or the golden mouth, had raiſed him from the condition of a ſequeſtered monk, to preſide over the clergy of the Eaſtern empire: but his elevation, though propitious to his glory, was fatal to his peace. The auſterity of a hermit was ill ſuited to the manners of a corrupt metropolis. The in-

flexible prelate engaged in a dangerous quarrel with the empreſs Eudoxia, and, after ſuſtaining his epiſcopal office nine years, under the viciſſitudes of triumph and diſgrace, he expired in 407, at the age of ſixty, and in the midſt of hardſhips inflicted on him as a perſecuted exile.

I have already had occaſion to quote ſome paſſages from this accompliſhed ſaint, in ſpeaking of the unorthodox cohabitation of prieſts and virgins; a licentious, or at leaſt an offenſive cuſtom, which Chryſoſtom had the honour of ſuppreſſing, by his eloquent invectives. In theſe we have ſeen, that the holy father beſtowed on virginity the moſt magnificent praiſe; but I am yet to give an account of a long and regular panegyric, which he compoſed expreſsly on this favourite topic.

He opens this elaborate treatiſe with a ſevere condemnation of all heretical virgins, whom he ſinks to a condition below that of the Chriſtian adultereſs. He uncharitably repreſents the Pagan Old Maid as an immediate

diate miniſter of the devil; nay, he will not allow that ſhe could be a virgin; for, although her perſon was pure, yet her ſoul, the more important part, was corrupted:—"And what," cries the animated ſaint, "what is the advantage, if the temple be "demoliſhed, that the veſtibule ſtands en-"tire?"

He proceeds, with great ſubtlety, to ſhew, "that he who condemns marriage, dimi-"niſhes the glory of true virginity; and "that he who praiſes wedlock, does the "higheſt honour to celibacy: for that "which is conſidered as good, on a com-"pariſon with evil, may be not eminently "good; but that which is better than "a bleſſing of univerſal eſtimation, muſt be "ſupremely excellent; and in this light," continues the ſaint, "we recommend vir-"ginity. Matrimony is good; and on this "account virginity is marvellous, becauſe "it is better than good*; and, if you wiſh

* Καλον ο γαμος και δια τουτο η παρθενια θαυμαστον οτι καλου κρειττον εστι.

Sanct. Chryſ. tom. iv. p. 322. edit. Par.

"it,

" it, I will inform you how far it is better;
" as much as heaven is better than earth,
" and angels than men."

In this compariſon, St. Chryſoſtom only echoes the ſentiment and expreſſion which we have already ſeen in more than one of his predeceſſors: but this eloquent encomiaſt of virginity was of a ſpirit too animated to content himſelf with a ſervile repetition, and we accordingly find him purſuing this idea, with addreſs and vigour peculiar to himſelf.

After ſaying, that virginity is as much ſuperior to wedlock, as angels are to men, he exclaims, " Or, to ſpeak with juſt energy,
" yet more; for the angels, if they neither
" marry nor are given in marriage, are not
" compounded of fleſh and blood; they
" have no ſettlement on earth, they feel not
" the perturbations of deſire. They neither
" hunger nor thirſt, they have no organs
" which can be ſoftened by muſic or faſci-
" nated by beauty; but, as the meridian
" ſky, where no clouds are collected, ap-
" pears

" pears pure, ſo their nature, unclouded by " mortal paſſions, muſt of neceſſity be clear " and lucid."

The ſaint proceeds to ſhew, that virgins, under the diſadvantage of mortality, engage in a ſucceſsful competition with theſe celeſtial ſpirits, and equal them in purity and perfection.—"But this," he exclaims with indignation, " this touches not you, ye " worldlings, who waſte this lovely trea- " ſure!—the portion of the unprofitable " ſervant is reſerved for you; but to the " virgins of the church, many and great re- " wards ſhall be allotted, ſuch as neither eye " nor ear can perceive, nor human under- " ſtanding comprehend."

He then attempts to refute the objections which have been urged againſt celibacy, by affirming, that marriage is by no means neceſſary for the preſervation and continuance of the human race; and, as a proof of this, he aſſerts (what other ſaints have alſo maintained) that Adam had no connubial intercourſe

courſe with Eve, till after their expulſion from Paradiſe.

He goes yet farther, and affirms, it is not virginity, but ſin, that has a tendency to diminiſh and deſtroy the human ſpecies; and ſupports his remark by the hiſtory of the deluge.

The ſaint proceeds to make many ſevere reflections on thoſe who treat virginity with contempt. He expatiates on the excellence and the merits of the maidenly condition. He dwells on the ſevere bondage of wedlock, and particularly on the hard caſe of that wife who may wiſh to live in a ſtate of continence, and yet cannot lawfully refuſe thoſe careſſes to which ſhe has no inclination. He contraſts the ſingle and the married life in every point of view, and uniformly decides in favour of the firſt.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

On St. Jerom, and his various Compoſitions in Praiſe of Virginity.

I SHALL cloſe my catalogue of holy panegyriſts with the mention of a ſaint who was equal, and perhaps ſuperior, to all his ſainted brethren, in extent of learning, in vigour of genius, and, above all, in vehemence of zeal for the ſupport of virginity. I mean the paſſionate and the witty St. Jerom, who paſſed a great part of his ſingular life either in ſtruggling with his own turbulent deſires in a lonely wilderneſs, or in preaching continence to the devout and rich ladies of a luxurious city. He was born about the year 345, on the confines of Dalmatia, received his education at Rome, and travelled into Gaul. He then propoſed to ſettle in the metropolis of Italy, but the religious activity of his ſpirit ſoon hurried

him into the Eaſt; and, having viſited the moſt hallowed places of that country, he devoted himſelf to a ſtate of ſevereſt mortification in the deſerts of Syria. Sickneſs drove him to Antioch; from thence he was led to Conſtantinople by his deſire of converſing with St. Gregory Nazianzen. Eccleſiaſtical buſineſs now carried him to Rome, and it was at this advanced period of his life that he became the favourite preceptor of many Roman ladies, who, while they attended his exhortations to chaſtity, were very wantonly cenſured for their devout familiarity with this eloquent enthuſiaſt. The attachment of his female diſciples, though probably very innocent, was undoubtedly very ſtrong, as ſome of them followed him into the Holy Land, where he ended an unquiet but illuſtrious life, at the age of fourſcore. Among theſe diſciples, a widow, whoſe name was Paula, attracted the notice of the world by her rank and fortune, and ſtill more by the fervency of her devotion. The ardent friendſhip which

St. Jerom profeſſed for this lady had a conſiderable influence on his life and writings. What he ſuffered, and what he enjoyed, in the pious connection, he has himſelf very forcibly deſcribed, in a letter addreſſed to Aſella, a religious maiden of peculiar ſanctity. In ſpeaking of the Roman ladies, he ſays, " * I lived among them almoſt three " years, and was frequently ſurrounded " by a croud of virgins. To ſome I often " explained the ſcripture. My lectures " produced attention — attention, famili- " arity—and familiarity, confidence. But " let them ſay if they ever obſerved in me " any thing unbecoming a Chriſtian. I ac- " cepted, indeed, the money of ſome; their " preſents, whether ſmall or great, I did " not

* Penè certè triennium cum eis vixi; multa me virginum crebrò turba circumdedit. Divinos libros, ut potui, nonnullis ſæpè diſſerui. Lectio aſſiduitatem, aſſiduitas familiaritatem, familiaritas fiduciam fecerat. Dicant quid unquam in me aliter ſenſerint quam Chriſtianum decebat. Pecuniam cujuſquam accepi; munera vel parva vel magna non ſprevi: nihil mihi aliud

" not deſpiſe; yet nothing was ever al-
" ledged againſt me except my ſex, and
" even that was never alledged againſt me,
" till Paula travelled to Jeruſalem. Before
" I became familiar with the houſe of the
" holy Paula, I had gained the general ap-
" plauſe of the whole city; and by the
" judgment of almoſt all, I was regarded
" as worthy the higheſt rank in the church.
" I was called a ſaint, I was called humble
" and eloquent.—Did I ever enter the
" doors of any gay or wanton lady? Were
" ſilk and jewels, a painted face, and a pro-
" fuſion of gold, any attractions to me?—
" There was no matron of Rome who
" could

aliud objicitur niſi ſexus meus; et hoc nunquam objicitur, niſi quum Jeroſolymam Paula proficiſcitur. Antequam domum ſanctæ Paulæ noſſem, totius in me urbis ſtudia conſonabant; omnium penè judicio dignus ſummo ſacerdotio decernebar. Dicebar ſanctus, dicebar humilis et diſertus. Numquid domum alicujus laſcivioris ingreſſus ſum? numquid me veſtes ſericæ, nitentes gemmæ, picta facies, auri rapuit ambitio? Nulla fuit alia Romæ matronarum quæ meam poſſet

edomare

" could conquer my mind, except her diſ-
" tinguiſhed by mourning and mortifica-
" tion, coarſe in her attire, and almoſt
" blind with weeping—whom the ſun often
" finds imploring, through ſucceſſive nights,
" the mercy of her God—whoſe ſongs are
" pſalms—whoſe converſation, the goſpel
" —whoſe luxury, continence—whoſe life
" a faſt. No woman could delight me, ex-
" cept her whom I never beheld in the act
" of eating: but as ſoon as I began to eſ-
" teem, to revere, and look up to her for
" the merit of her chaſtity, from that mo-
" ment all my own virtues forſook me."

The ſaint proceeds to vent his indigna-tion againſt the envy and malice of thoſe

edomare mentem, niſi lugens atque jejunans, ſqualens ſordibus, fletibus penè cæcata; quam continuis noctibus miſericordiam Domini deprecantem ſol ſæpè deprehendit; cujus canticum pſalmi, ſermo evangelium; deliciæ continentia, vita jejunium. Nulla me potuit alia delectare, niſi illa quam manducantem nunquam vidi; ſed poſtquam eam pro ſuæ merito caſtitatis venerari, colere, ſuſcipere cœpi, omnes me illicò deſeruere virtutes. Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 66.

who had accuſed him of a criminal intrigue with this devout lady; and he cloſes his letter with all the animation of injured innocence, profeſſing, in ſpite of the cenſorious world, an everlaſting attachment both to the widow Paula, and her maiden daughter Euſtochium. To the latter he has addreſſed one of his moſt remarkable compoſitions; and of this I ſhall now give a brief account. It is intitled, "An Epiſtle on the Preſervation of Virginity."—"I do "not intend in this diſcourſe," ſays the ſaint to his fair diſciple, "to rehearſe to you "the praiſes of that maidenly condition, "which you have found to be moſt excel-"lent, nor to enumerate the troubles of "matrimony. There will be no adulation "in this little treatiſe, no rhetorical pomp "of language, which may inveſt you with "the dignity of an angel, and, by deſcrib-"ing the beatitude of virginity, lay the "world at your feet. I do not wiſh that "the life you have embraced ſhould in-"ſpire you with pride, but with caution:

" you travel, laden with treaſure, it is there-
" fore your buſineſs to avoid a thief*."

After this friendly admonition, the ſaint proceeds to ſpeak of the inceſſant danger to which virginity is expoſed; and, to alarm his tender pupil in the higheſt degree, he ſays, with a temerity of language which his zeal, I think, can hardly excuſe, " Though " God is all powerful, he cannot raiſe up a " virgin that is ruined. He is able, indeed, " to deliver her from puniſhment; but " he will not beſtow a crown on the cor-" rupted †. Virginity," continues the ſaint, " may even periſh by the ſimple offences " of the mind, and be loſt only by har-" bouring a licentious idea."—St. Jerom is very candid, in adding to this rigid maxim a ſtriking hiſtory of his own turbu-

* Onuſta incedis auro, latro tibi vitandus eſt.
Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

† Audenter loquar: quum omnia poſſit Deus, ſuſcitare virginem non poteſt poſt ruinam. Valet quidem liberare de pœna, ſed non vult coronare corruptam. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

lent and wanton thoughts in the wilderneſs to which he retired. In ſpite of the ſevere mortifications by which he there endeavoured to ſubdue the propenſities of nature, in the midſt of faſting, ſolitude, and prayer, his ardent imagination, he confeſſes, hurried him from the ſilent deſert to ſcenes of Roman luxury, and the ſociety of girls. From this honeſt confeſſion, he draws a forcible argument in favour of temperance. —"If they," ſays the ſaint, "who reduce "their bodies by abſtinence, are thus tor- "mented by their fancy, what muſt the "damſel ſuffer, who is indulged in every "delicacy? If, therefore, I have any right "to adviſe, if you can credit experience, "this is my firſt admonition, this my moſt "earneſt intreaty, that the conſecrated vir- "gin may fly from wine as from poiſon." —The ſaint expatiates on the neceſſity of abſtinence, both as to food and liquor; and he concludes his advice on this topic with theſe remarkable expreſſions: —"It "is not that Heaven is delighted with the "rumbling

" rumbling of our inteſtines, but chaſtity " cannot otherwiſe be ſafe *."

This caution is followed by a very ſtriking picture of the diſſolute manners which prevailed in that age. The ladies and the clergy are treated with equal ſeverity by the indignant Jerom; their vices are deſcribed with that ſingular vehemence of angry wit, that energy of metaphor, by which the writings of this eloquent father are peculiarly diſtinguiſhed: " I am aſhamed " to ſay," exclaims the animated ſaint, " how many virgins are daily ruined! " what illuſtrious maidens are loſt from the " very boſom of our mother church! over " what fallen ſtars the proud enemy rears " his throne †!" He ſtrikes at the coha-

* Non quod Deus inteſtinorum noſtrorum rugitu delectetur, ſed quod aliter pudicitia tuta eſſe non poſſit. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

† Pudet dicere quot quotidiè virgines ruant, quantas de ſuo gremio mater perdat eccleſia, ſuper quæ ſydera inimicus ſuperbus ponat thronum ſuum; quot petras excavet, et habitet coluber in foraminibus earum.

bitation, that I have mentioned before, between the prieſts and the canonical virgins: "How was this peſt," cries the angry Jerom, "introduced into the church * ?"

The ſaint proceeds to contraſt with theſe licentious manners the extreme purity of his young diſciple, in which he exhorts her to perſevere with various precepts; he dwells chiefly on abſtinence and nightly prayer. He recommends to her ſeveral authors, who had written on virgins—Tertullian, St. Cyprian, his friend Damaſus the Roman pontiff, who celebrated virginity both in proſe and verſe, but, above all, the treatiſe of St. Ambroſe, of which I have given an account, and which St. Jerom extols as a maſter-piece of eloquence. He cautions her at the ſame time, againſt all profaner ſtudies, and particularly the amuſement of poetry.

* Unde in eccleſias agapetarum peſtis introiit? unde meretrices univiræ? Eadem domo, uno cubiculo, ſæpè uno tenentur et lectulo, et ſuſpicioſos nos vocant, ſi aliquid exiſtimamus. Epiſt. ad Euſtoch.

There

There is a very pleaſing peculiarity in this generous ſaint; I mean, his cuſtom of relating a little hiſtory of his own frailties, to form a more forcible leſſon for the uſe of his diſciple. Of this we have already ſeen one example, in the narration of his wanton thoughts in the deſert. A ſecond now occurs, on the ſubject of profane literature. He confeſſes to his fair pupil, that, after ſpending ſome time in his ſacred ſtudies, in faſting and prayer, he uſed to amuſe himſelf with the comedies of Plautus, which delighted him ſo much, that when he returned to the peruſal of the prophets, he found them inſufferably dull. A fever attacked him, and, at the height of his diſtemper, he was tranſported, in a viſion, before the tribunal of a judge, who, upbraiding him for his attachment to the literature of the Gentiles, commanded him to be ſcourged. The conſcious Jerom acknowledges the juſtice of this ſentence, and ſupports the reality of his puniſhment, by appealing to the ſtripes which he continued,

he ſays, to feel after his ſleep had left him.

In ſpeaking of literature, St. Jerom has ſome curious expreſſions concerning the literary magnificence of his age. "Parch-" ment," ſays he, "is tinged with purple, " gold flows into letters, and books are ar-" rayed in jewels." He aſcribes this paſſion for ſplendor to the Roman ladies, whom he repreſents, in general, as full of oſtentation, and deſtitute of virtue.

From hence he takes occaſion to put his fair diſciple on her guard againſt luxury and avarice.

At the diſtance of thirty years from the compoſition of theſe inſtructions to the tender Euſtochium, we find the ardent St. Jerom addreſſing, with the ſame zeal for chaſtity, another Roman virgin, of equal or ſuperior eminence; I mean the celebrated Demetrias, the grand-daughter of Proba, a matron of the higheſt rank and character in Rome, who, flying from that city, when it was taken by the Goths, eſcaped with her family,

family, and the wreck of an immenſe fortune, to the coaſt of Africa. The young and lovely Demetrias—inflamed with a pious paſſion for the palm of virginity, or alarmed, perhaps, by the fate of many illuſtrious Roman damſels, torn from their exiled parents, and baſely ſold to Syrian merchants by the infamous Count Heraclian, who commanded in Africa—ſought an aſylum in the church, by aſſuming the veil. The holy maiden was complimented by the moſt eminent ſaints of the age on this act of devotion. Nothing can more forcibly ſhew the high conſequence of canonical virgins in that period, than the epiſtle of St. Jerom to Demetrias. After ſome praiſe beſtowed on her own character, and that of her family, he repreſents her conſecration as an event which diffuſed ſuch univerſal joy throughout the Roman world, that it compenſated in a great meaſure the late overthrow of the imperial city. He affirms, that the delight and exultation of the Roman

man people, on this occaſion, were ſuperior to what they had formerly diſplayed, both when their country was delivered from the ravages of the Gauls, and when, after the fatal battles of Trebia, Thraſymene, and Cannæ, they firſt heard of the victory which Marcellus obtained at Nola. This, ſurely, is one of the moſt hyperbolical compliments that was ever paid to a fair devotee, and affords us a curious proof how far the imagination of our lively ſaint would ſometimes outrun his judgment. But though his zeal has overcharged the picture, we muſt remember that he painted from life: and his deſcription of the effects produced by the conſecration of this noble damſel, exhibits in the ſtrongeſt light the maidenly enthuſiaſm of that period. After declaring that the joy of Demetrias's family was ſuch as the eloquence both of Cicero and Demoſthenes would be unequal to deſcribe, St Jerom exclaims, " Good God, what " was their exultation! as from one fruit-

" ful

" ful root many virgins ſhot forth *; a " multitude of female dependants purſued " the example of their lady; the profeſſion " of virginity prevailed in every houſe †. " I ſpeak too faintly: all the churches of " Africa exulted; the fame of the pious " virgin pervaded every city, every town " every village, to the moſt lonely hut; all " the iſlands between Africa and Italy were " filled with the joyful tidings. Then Italy " threw off her garb of mourning, and the " half demoliſhed walls of Rome recovered " a part of their priſtine ſplendor, her God " being deemed propitious in this perfect " converſion of her daughter. You would " have thought the race of Goths ex- " tinguiſhed, and all her baſe enemies " ſtruck dead by the avenging thunder of " heaven."

* Quaſi ex radice fœcunda, multæ ſimul virgines pullulârunt.

† Per omnes domos fervebat virginitatis profeſſio. Parum loquor, &c.

Sanct. Hieron. Epiſt. ad Demetriadem.

Having

Having repreſented the effects of her conſecration in theſe flattering colours, St. Jerom proceeds to favour this illuſtrious virgin with many precepts for the maintenance of her purity. He dwells on the uſual topics of temperance and prayer. He ingeniouſly compares the virgin, who lives chaſtely in the warmth of youth, to thoſe holy perſons who continued unhurt in the fiery furnace. To the rich virgin he obſerves, that it is more meritorious to employ a large fortune in charitable donations to the poor, than in building a coſtly and ſplendid church. He adviſes his fair pupil to amuſe herſelf with manual work. He cautions her againſt the inſidious doctrine of the heretic Rufinus. He exhorts her never to hear any converſation between a man and his wife, as ſuch dialogues are of an infectious nature *. "Chuſe her for "your companion," ſays the ſaint, "who

* Ne audias quid vel maritus uxori, vel uxor locuta ſit viro: venenatæ ſunt hujuſcemodi confabulationes. Epiſt. ad Demet.

"never

" never ſuſpects that ſhe is handſome; who " never throws back her cloak to diſcover " her neck, but covers even her face ſo " carefully, that ſhe has hardly one eye, " when ſhe is walking in public, ſuffi- " ciently unveiled to diſcern her path."

The ſaint then ſpeaks of his own former compoſition on the preſervation of virginity; a work, he ſays, which raiſed to him many enemies, on account of the honeſt freedom with which he arraigned the vices of the time. He is ſtill, however, equally ſevere on female licentiouſneſs: " Many," ſays he, " affect the ſanctity of canonical " virgins, that they may more quietly in- " dulge their impure deſires. Theſe things," continues the ſaint, " we ſee and ſuffer, " and, when dazzled by a piece of gold, " we even rank them in the catalogue of " good works *." He concludes with exhorting his chaſte diſciple to love the ſcripture; and, what has a ludicrous tendency to

* Hæc videmus et patimur, et ſi aureus nummus affulſerit, inter bona opera deputamus.

overthrow

overthrow all his favourite doctrine, he entreats her to revere her *grandmother* as a model of perfection.

The reſpectful love which St. Jerom had conceived for virginity was ſo great, that it appears to have been the ruling paſſion of his life, and may be traced in almoſt all his writings. In his letters to different friends who had conſulted him on the education of their female infants, he diſcovers the moſt ardent and anxious deſire to form, from the cradle, a religious Old Maid. In adviſing a lady, whoſe name was Læta, to teach her little daughter to read by letters of box or ivory, he gives her a particular caution to let no boys come near the infant maiden. The whole letter is curious, as it circumſtantially deſcribes the very ſingular cautions which St. Jerom thought neceſſary to form a female character of accompliſhed purity.—But I muſt haſten to ſpeak of the two more elaborate works of this ſaint, in which his predominant paſſion may be ſaid to burſt forth with the greateſt fervency.

The

The firſt of theſe is a treatiſe on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary, in oppoſition to Helvidius, who had attempted to prove, by paſſages from the goſpel, that, after the birth of our Saviour, the Virgin Mary had other children by her huſband Joſeph. After replying to all the arguments of his adverſary with great acuteneſs and ſtrength of reaſon, St. Jerom indulges himſelf in a rhetorical deſcription of the two oppoſite characters, a virgin and a wife; and he concludes his treatiſe by magnifying the pre-eminence of the former with all the lively ſpirit of eloquent enthuſiaſm.—The ſecond is a work, in which the zeal of our ſaint, for the honour of virginity, aroſe to a ſtill higher pitch; I mean his anſwer to Jovinian. This Italian monk, of a moderate and reſpectable character, had very candidly aſſerted, that the married women and virgins, who lived in equal obedience to the laws of the goſpel, were equally meritorious. The indignation of the zealous Jerom took fire at this aſſertion; he could not

not bear that thoſe objects of his idolatry, the pure virgins of the church, ſhould be thus placed on a level with women debaſed, in his idea, even by a legal cohabitation with man. He is ſo hurried on by the vehemence of his anger, that he exclaims, in the opening of his reply, "How ſhall I "check myſelf, and not indulge the wea-"pon ſo impatient to ſtrike in the cauſe of "virginity *?" Indeed, the warm ſaint appears utterly unable to conduct the controverſy with any degree of temper. Comparing the candid doctrine of his adverſary to the hiſſing of the old ſerpent, he threatens to cruſh him as the moſt vile and pernicious of reptiles.

The paſſionate compoſitions of a bold and vigorous mind, enriched with extenſive learning, are generally entertaining, though

* Unde cohibebo curſum, nec indulgebo mucroni jam nunc pro virginitate ferire cupienti?

S. Hieron. adverſus Jovinianum, lib. i.

full of error and abſurdity. There is an attractive energy in ſatirical wit, however deſtitute of truth, when it is ſharpened by indignation or envy. It is owing, perhaps, in ſome meaſure, to this forcible charm, that ſome unjuſt compoſitions of two very different authors, Voltaire and Dr. Johnſon, have been read with peculiar avidity. In many ſtrokes of perſonal character, and in the compact vigour of their ſtyle, theſe great writers both reſembled St. Jerom. Sarcaſtic imagination and literary pride were, perhaps, the predominant characteriſtics of this ſingular triumvirate; they all delighted to exert the talent which they all poſſeſſed, of blowing an adverſary to pieces with a ſparkling exploſion of irritable wit.

The mild and unfortunate Jovinian, though he had mercy and juſtice on his ſide, ſunk under the vindictive eloquence of St. Jerom, who ſupported againſt his antagoniſt the pre-eminence of his favourite virginity by a variety of arguments,

and a torrent of ſacred and prophane erudition. The ſaint very artfully perverts many texts of ſcripture to his purpoſe, and from ſome of them draws a wonderful inference againſt the purity of matrimonial duties *. He dwells on the authority of St. Paul, in his famous exhortation to celibacy. He affirms that virgins are more beloved by heaven, becauſe their ſacrifice is not enjoined, but voluntary. He declares, there is as much difference between marriage and virginity, as between not ſinning and doing good.

Having made the utmoſt of thoſe texts in ſcripture, which could be converted to the honour of virginity, he proceeds to ſhew, that a ſtate of continence was no new eſtabliſhment, introduced in oppoſition to nature by the Chriſtian church, but of ancient and univerſal eſtimation. In this

* Si abſtinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus; ſi non abſtinemus, perſpicuum eſt honori contrariam eſſe contumeliam. Sanct. Hieron.

part of his treatiſe, he gives an ample catalogue of the moſt eminent ſuppoſed virgins of the Pagan world, not omitting the Camilla and Harpalice of Virgil. He mentions the tradition of the Indian Gymnoſophiſts, that the founder of their religious inſtitutions was generated from the ſide of a virgin. He condeſcends to repeat even the Grecian fable concerning Plato's mother, who was ſaid to have been impregnated by a phantom of Apollo *.

There are ſeveral points of religious doctrine which St. Jerom diſputes with his antagoniſt, but I touch only on that which is particularly connected with the ſubject of this Eſſay. This, indeed, is the point for which the angry ſaint moſt vehemently contends. His indignation ſeems to have been particularly rouſed by the great eagerneſs with which the Roman ladies had embraced the liberal maxims of his opponent. Some cannonical virgins, convinced by Jovi-

* Phantaſmate Apollinis.

nian of the innocence and the merits of matrimony, had dropped the veil, and preferred the warm protection of a huſband, to the chilling ſhelter of the church. St. Jerom, in the cloſe of his invective, very forcibly deſcribes the popularity of his antagoniſt. He laments that the rich and noble received him with deference and affection. He repreſents him as the preceptor of impurity, ſurrounded by multitudes of laſcivious women, who have loſt, not only their modeſty, but all ſenſe of ſhame; "and who diſplay more wantonneſs," ſays the ſaint, "in the argumentative defence of "their deſire, than in its actual exertion."— He concludes with a ſpirited addreſs to Rome, as the miſtreſs of the world. He beſeeches the imperial city to act in conformity to her ancient reputation, to be exalted by virtue, and not humbled by pleaſure.

Though Jovinian ſeems to have had a large majority of the fair ſex on his ſide, his mild doctrine concerning them was formally

mally condemned by eccleſiaſtical authority, and he died in exile. St Jerom aroſe triumphant from the conteſt; yet we find that many pious critics in Rome arraigned his compoſition, for extolling virginity to ſuch a pitch, by the degradation of wedlock. In ſome of his letters he treats theſe critics with the utmoſt contempt. He aſſerts, in ſupport of his own doctrine, that the apoſtles were either unmarried, or continent after marriage *. He concludes one of his epiſtles on this topic with an air of jocularity, by ſaying, "To explain my ſentiments on wedlock completely, I would "have all thoſe provide themſelves with "wives, who, from their nightly fears, are "unable to lie alone †."

Such was the doctrine, and ſuch the ſuc-

* Apoſtoli vel virgines, vel poſt nuptias continentes. Sanct. Hieron. Epiſt. ad Pammachium, tom. iv. p. 242. edit. Par. 1705.

† Volo omnes, qui propter nocturnos forſitan metus ſoli cubitare non poſſunt, uxores ducere. Sanct. Hieron Epiſt. ad Domnionem.

ceſs,

ceſs, of St. Jerom, as the eulogiſt of virginity. It may amuſe the Engliſh reader to ſee this eloquent and chaſte enthuſiaſt in the character of a poet; I ſhall therefore cloſe the chapter with a tranſlation of the epitaph which he compoſed on his great friend and patroneſs, the illuſtrious Paula.—This lady, after reſiding about twenty years in Bethlem, where ſhe had founded three monaſteries for virgins, and one for monks—and after acting as a mother to all the Chriſtian pilgrims, who then crouded to the holy ſepulchre—ended a life of the ſtricteſt piety, in the year 404, at the age of fifty-ſix. The faithful St. Jerom lamented her with the moſt paſſionate affliction, and placed on different parts of the rock which was converted into her tomb, the two following inſcriptions.

* *She, who from Scipio deriv'd her birth,*
Paula, is laid within this hallow'd earth:
Her lineage from the Gracchi's ſplendid race,
And Agamemnon's royal houſe, we trace;
Euſtothium's mother, firſt of Roman dames!
But ſcorning worldly pride, and pompous names,
In Bethlem ſacred rural ſpot! ſhe choſe
With chriſtian poverty her life to cloſe.

On the front of the cave.

See you this ſtony ſepulchre? It hides
Paula's remains, who now in heaven reſides.

* *Scipio quam genuit, Pauli fudere parentes,*
Gracchorum ſoboles, Agamemnonis inclyta proles,
Hoc jacet in tumulo; Paulam dixere priores:
Euſtochii genetrix, Romani prima ſenatûs!
Pauperiem Chriſti et Bethlemitica rura ſequuta.

In fronte ſpeluncæ.

Aſpicis anguſtum præciſâ rupe ſepulcrum?
Hoſpitium Paulæ eſt, cœleſtia regna tenentis.
Fratrem, cognatos, Romam, patriamque reliquens,
Divitias, ſobolem, Bethlemiti conditur antro.
Hic præſepe tuum, Chriſte, atque hìc myſtica Magi
Munera portantes, Hominique Deoque dedere.

Sanct. Hieron. tom. iv. p. 689.

Friends,

Friends, country, children, wealth—from all
she fled
To lay in Bethlem's holy rock her head:
Cradle of Chriſt! a ſcene the Magi trod,
Hailing, with myſtic gifts, our human God.

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END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.